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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of advisory in the programs of middle and high school students can be a constructive innovation. Nonetheless, the underlying premise of advisory--that schools have a responsibility to meet important non-academic needs--does contain some ambiguity. The use of classroom time devoted to advisory for adolescents is investigated in this paper. The study was prompted by recurring observations that classroom advisory time was not well used. Using a series of observations and interviews, conditions in the classroom and the school which influenced outcomes, such as dropping out of high school or repeating a grade, were studied. A review of the literature was also conducted. Results indicate that outcomes seemed most influenced by the personality, views, and attitudes of the teacher or worker who conducted advisories. Some advisors possessed considerable experience and training, whereas others had little. The need for schools to provide both training and ongoing support if they desired a successful teacher advisor program was also apparent. Training emerged as the key ingredient of school support; certain structural factors, such as the way in which advisors conduct advisory sessions, emerged as important in outcomes. (RJM)

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A Study of Advisory

by

Gail Boorstein

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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The age of intellectual cultivation is coming to an end, not because the uncultured are gaining the ascendancy, but because the signs are appearing of a world-age in which that which is worthy of questioning will someday again open the door that leads to what is essential in all things and in all destinings.

Martin Heidegger, Science and Reflection

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This paper is an investigation of the actual and potential use of classroom time devoted to advisory for adolescents. It is based on the assumption that the inclusion of advisory in the program of middle and high school students is, at least potentially, a constructive innovation. The study was prompted by my frequent observation, during the second term of my student teaching year, that classroom time devoted to advisory was less than well used. Why, and what factors might influence this, I wondered. What ingredients are needed to make advisory "work"? And what, under present cultural conditions, can this forum be expected, and even hoped, to accomplish?

The underlying premise of advisory, that schools have responsibility to meet important non-academic needs, is constructive in spite of its underlying ambiguity. Are schools to construe this new, affective, responsibility narrowly, with the understanding that the goal is, in fact, to improve academic performance? Or has acknowledgment been made of wider, or if you will, deeper responsibilities toward our nation's youth that teachers are now being asked to fill? To frame this investigation, I have included in this introduction 1) my perspective on our present milieu; 2) my recollected observations of the particular advisory that prompted this investigation, and 3) a brief note about my own experience in advisement at Bank Street College. Following this is a description of the methods used in carrying out the study including discussion of its limitations.

To begin, let us leave teachers, schools, and the state of education aside for a moment, in order to consider the wider context of advisory, which is also the context of adolescence: the state of society in the United States of America at the close of the twentieth century.

Regardless of whether one considers adolescence to be a developmental stage or a social construction, it is a real and pervasive condition in American society. In traditional cultures where the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by anticipated and celebrated rites of passage, roles and behaviors are clearly defined. In contemporary post-industrial society such sequence and structure is outmoded, lost.

Unpatterning the transition from childhood to adulthood might not be so bad were it not for the complexity and pathology of the society our students enter. In a world of burgeoning human population and declining natural systems, we still teach democracy in school as if our political system were not irretrievably in the hands of multi-billion dollar corporations. Children are the targets of sophisticated corporate advertising weaponry from the time their parents place them in front of a television. (What American child does not aspire to own a car?) Is it possible to imagine what would it be like to live where it is safe to walk on the street or where air, water and food are not poisoned?

Natural systems are complex but when, or where, humans live in harmony with them their lives are simple, harmonious with their own limbic systems as well as with the natural economy that sustains them. While such people may not be able to explain the intricacies of photosynthesis or energy flow in the food chain, their understanding of the essential factors upon which their survival rests is incontrovertible and an intrinsic, grounded well-being results. Such is not the state of the city dweller whose food comes from a store, water from a tap, entertainment on a screen, money from a check. The connection of self to the sustaining circle of life is forgotten, lost, paved over. Anxiety and insecurity are inevitable results.

In the milieu of progressive education (where this paper is written), some of these considerations occupy a murky realm of questionable political correctness. Inequality is rampant and accelerating. Anything not pertaining directly to issues of social justice is tinged with elitism. But what will truly serve to mitigate human suffering? The standard approach to the constellation of social justice issues takes our capitalist market economy to task for neglecting its moral responsibilities. (Berry 1988) It, or we, must be brought in line with virtuous principles.

But a moral gloss on a flawed Darwinian theory cannot compensate for the larger implications of our economic system. In the preface to the current edition of The Worldly Philosophers, his classic depiction of the ideas of the great economic thinkers, Robert Heilbroner remarks on a fundamental blindness.

> What is perhaps most astonishing in the history of economic thought is that neither its authors nor its audience are usually aware of fundamental aspects of the inquiry they are pursuing. (Heilbroner 1992, 7)

We have yet to face the fact that our economic system is an overlay on what we might call the economics of the earth.

Can the mandate for advisory be fulfilled without acknowledging the precipice upon which we find ourselves? The Carnegie Council report on the education of young adolescents, Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, began the movement toward middle schools, as well as toward teacher-led advisory programs. It said:

> Every student should be well known by at least one adult. Students should be able to rely on that adult to help learn from their experiences, comprehend physical changes and changing relations with family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every school and community resource needed for the student to succeed, and help fashion a promising vision of the future. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989, 40)

Regardless of where along the spectrum of privilege a student falls, with what level of conviction can a promising vision of an individual's future be mapped without acknowledging the roots of our cultural anomie? Advisory

is generally understood to be about building self esteem and values (Libsch 1995), but on what foundation can solid construction in these domains be undertaken?

One starting place might be a kind of healing of the self. Speaking on the subject of resistance at the time of the Viet Nam War, Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese peace activist, Buddhist monk, and poet says:

> Living in modern society, one feels that he cannot easily retain integrity, wholeness. One is robbed permanently of humanness, the capacity of being oneself. When I drive through Paris, the noises and the traffic jams make me nervous. Once I have gone through Paris I become less than myself. And there are so many things like that in modern life that make you loose yourself. So perhaps, first of all, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted, and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly. (Naht Hanh, no date)

Coming to oneself is a central matter. In adolescence one is faced with the task of doing this for the first time. This is a more difficult task than recovering what we know we have lost. We need to recognize it for the first time. Nhat Hanh suggests that coming to oneself may be facilitated by the experience of nature and by the presence of a person who is firmly rooted in himself, as well as by a particular place associated with such a person.

In New York City, where nature is remote and inaccessible, this powerful vehicle is not readily available. If Nhat Hanh serves as guide, our hope must be in the teacher, and perhaps the place their humanity establishes in advisory. But goals for advisory need to be examined within the context of the goals of education. Here I offer only a question, in the form of notes from a conversation with my own mentor, my advisor Madeleine Ray. She said, in a conversation related to this project, while it was still in the process of being conceptualized:

> Was school ever designed to educate? What sense of purpose do we offer students in going to school? Do we really want to create educated people? Or train kids on a minimal level to fill certain slots in society? The schools who do more are training the elite. How do we think about education? Is it more than a job preparing resources?

If the research designed to evaluate the effecaciousness of advisory, which does so in terms of student performance (MacIver 1991) is taken as a guide, we have evidence in support of the training model. David Purpel paints a realistic picture when he says

> Most teachers and administrators will deny that material success represents their conception of the Ultimately significant, while at the same time it is likely they will strongly defend as realistic and reasonable helping students to adapt and to succeed in the current culture. (Purpel 1991, 56)

Purpel believes that our "educational process . . . has at its deepest roots a concern for meaning" (ibid., 37) but the point is arguable, whether one likes it or not. Although Purpel's critique is well taken, it does not appear to reflect a deep enough understanding of the roots of our moral dislocation. Before we can expect teachers to act meaningfully as moral leaders, and whatever else he expects of us, we need to see where we are. When Purpel says, after somewhat desperately casting about for a way to get the sacred into the picture, "Educational communities must meditate on the question of what it means to be sacred and how an education might facilitate the quest for what is holy," (ibid., 78) he reveals his confusion. While meditation is an inward process, the quest is an externalizing, linear metaphor which does not, I believe, connote a desirable mode. Here the holy is assumed to be outside ourselves and the surroundings of our daily lives. If even Purpel, with his concern for what he terms the moral and spiritual crisis in education, inhabits what followers of those insightful Chilean biologists, Mantura and Varela, call the old paradigm, what can be expected, or hoped from our school systems?

Initial Observations

To further frame this study, I include my observations from the advisory that provoked it. The school, North Park Secondary School (NPSS) is a famous school. It is one of the oldest and most esteemed of the alternative public schools in New York City.

The NPSS student body of 350 students is a nearly even mix of African-Americans and Latinos with an occasional white or oriental student. Many families are middle class, a few live in poverty. The faculty is approximately one third African-American and two thirds white, with a sprinkling of Hispanics. Rather than grade levels, NPSS has three divisions. The first, Division I, is comprised of 7th and 8th grade students, Division II has 9th and 10th graders, and the Senior Institute, 11th and 12th. Each division is further subdivided into houses. During the 1995-96 school year, advisory in Division I met in groups of thirteen for four hourly sessions per week, three times in the middle of the day, once during first period. The fifth day was community service day.

All faculty, not just classroom teachers were responsible for an advisory group. One of the advisors in the house of my students was one of the school's co-directors. This director was frequently obliged to be elsewhere during advisory time. On these occasions his advisees would be divided between the two other groups. Then it was not really advisory. There might be a reading of the school newspaper if that was the day for it, but often students would be given the time to work. This sort of work period was characterized by requests to go to the library, to the computer room, or anywhere students could be unsupervised. Usually the classroom became almost empty, and problems would develop in the lavatories.

Alternatively, students might be directed to do "silent reading." There had been a school-wide decision made shortly before my arrival that one advisory session per week would be spent doing silent reading. There was, however, no effective program attached to these periods, although there was a school-wide requirement that students read a book a month to add to a list

kept in a portfolio. In order to work, such a program requires considerable teacher input, helping students find books, and monitoring their progress. At minimum a classroom library of appealing, age appropriate materials is necessary.

An advisor was responsible to have a well rounded knowledge of each of his advisees, including having a picture of their home life and anything currently disruptive that might be happening there. If another teacher has disciplinary or academic issues with a student, he or she discusses them with the advisor, and the advisor is involved in any meetings between that teacher and the student, as well as being the family liaison. The advisor serves as advocate for the student within the school, and counsels students on how to manage issues he or she might have with other teachers or elsewise within the school. This system, which seems to be more or less the norm in terms of teacher advising, appeared to work well, and is not directly part of my investigation.

The group I observed was a Division I group, under the leadership of Larry. A description of Larry is included with the interview I conducted with him toward the end of the study. In Larry's room the usual desk arrangement was a large square with the central space closed off by the figure of the desks. For advisory, students were instructed to re-form the smaller necessary number of desks into a narrow rectangle the width of the pre-existing square. The line of desks at the head of the room remained in place, while desks along the side were moved in to form the bottom of the rectangle. Everyone had a desk in front of them. We were in closer proximity than had we been spread out in the large square but unless you were the one or two persons seated at the narrow ends of the rectangle, it was less possible to see everyone. This was because nearly half the group would be sitting on your side of the table where you could see only those individuals directly adjacent to you. If intimacy was created by this configuration it was that of a seminar rather than of a circle.

Time was spent on current events sessions that were like pulling teeth, silent reading, sex education, study hall, school and classroom issues, and school news. NPSS publishes a weekly newspaper, and this would be read aloud during advisory, class members taking occasional turns. Often Larry did much of the reading and interpreting, impressing upon his charges what the implications of particular items (cuts in funding to the Board of Education, for example) might be for them, and what type of political action they might take in response. Current events was another format. Sometimes students had been asked to bring in articles of interest, more often Larry read an article about something he was passionate about. Sports, and sports figures were frequent subjects, leaving out the girls, who were a minority in this group. Larry often began the meeting by asking people what they had eaten for breakfast, a go-around. The results of this were often humorous. This was the sole example I can recall of this sort of circle practice in Larry's advisory, though it may have been used occasionally to elicit opinions on one or another subject, with heavy passing. The first session I attended featured (childless) Larry heavily engaged in demonstrating the cost of keeping a baby.

Occasionally, a disturbing event, either within the school or in the news, became the topic. Often in these cases Larry filled an interpretive role. In other words: "What is the reality here? How might it impact us?" Or, "This is/is not something you need to be on the alert about." At these times he had his student's attention.

During my semester at the school the one piece of planned curriculum for advisory was sex education. Sex education is beyond the scope of this paper because the factors which determine the planning for it are different than those effecting advisory. But some interesting things happened during this phase of NPSS Division I advisory. Most of the "serious" material was covered in sex segregated sessions run by Planned Parenthood. To follow up these sessions, which had allowed for questions but which were run by strangers and were rather technical and disease oriented, we held additional sex segregated sessions. Larry and Linda, who taught the same two classes of

students (Linda taught both classes math and science, Larry humanities) each met with the students of their respective sex. These sessions were by far the most live, and probably the most valuable sessions that term.

The boys and girls groups proceeded differently, but each with engagement. In the sessions in which I participated, I was struck by the value of having two adults present. In this case the divergence of experience, presence and perspective provided by one Catholic and one non-Catholic, allowed the girls to see that adults, as adolescents, differ considerably in their sexual experience and even in their level of comfort in discussion. Yet in spite of these differences, to the extent that we offered advice, our message was the same, and no doubt more powerful from this dual perspective.

The second thing of note was the buzz that followed these personal sessions. There was an air of something having happened, an experience had. This was in part from real questions being answered, in part from a different mode of presence on the part of the adults, and of the students as well. In trying to pinpoint what made this experience special, I am impressed by the fact that here was a situation in which not only did the students have real, burning questions they wanted answered, but they were ready, in fact happy to acknowledge the adults as knowing more than they did about something in which they were interested. They appreciated our willingness to discuss whatever they needed to discuss, without embarrassment, without judgment, but with understanding and care. At least in the case of the girls, our underlying attitude or assumption, that by informing them they would be more able to act responsibly, to make the right choices for themselves, was probably, at least in some cases divergent from their home experiences.

It wasn't until later in the study that I articulated the connection between the personal nature of the subject matter and the general level of engagement. I also carried from these experiences an interest in the incidence of sex segregated classes.

Advisement

The next section of this paper contains a detailed comparison of advisory and conference group at Bank Street. Here, I give a brief statement of my own experience as a member of an advisement group. For me the experience was transformative. There were two, or perhaps three key elements to this powerful experience. One was the group itself. We bonded strongly, and had a large measure of mutual respect. We looked forward to the opportunity to hear each other's views. There was also, for me, the dynamic of the group, and the experience of myself in it as I became conscious and "in control" of my role. Both of these experiences were new for me. Previously, I had not had the opportunity to participate in a group for long enough, or in a situation of sufficient trust, to sense myself in it, and to get feedback to verify my perceptions.

Some of this feedback was from fellow students, and some was from my advisor. I had not had a mentor before. This one was at times staggeringly insightful. You could tell her anything. The opportunity to be seen, to allow oneself to be seen, is a gift. There was mutual trust and respect. Almost inevitably you would fight with her. But the essential transformative element, I have come to believe, was the love which came to infuse our relationship. Is it necessary to touch someone so deeply to help them grow? Very possibly. When Laurie (CCHS) spoke to me about the spiritual element, love, and more love seemed to her to be to be key. Love is certainly accessible, and fundamental in teaching, if not much discussed. Much rides on the personhood of the advisor.

If there is a third element, it would be my own ripeness for change.

Methodology and Participants

The field work was done from December 1995 through June 1996. It was decided, in consultation with my mentor, to select schools/study sites on the basis of recommendation for excellence in advisory. From an initial list provided by my mentor, (Chair of Bank Street's Educational Leadership department), and by a colleague of his, selection then occurred on the basis of the receptivity and schedule of the various schools. Interestingly, NPSS was included on this list. I put considerable effort (although I stuck to official channels which is all I had elsewhere) into gaining permission to observe another group there but eventually gave up, mired in red tape.

Data was gathered primarily through interviews, some taped and later transcribed, some with notes taken during the session, occasionally with notes taken immediately following. The method used in each case is specified in the text. In addition, data was gathered by direct observation of advisory sessions, sometimes with notes taken as the meeting was going on, sometimes with notes taken afterwards to avoid engendering self consciousness on the part of participants.

The names of all schools, teachers, and students have been changed, with the exception of Bank Street College faculty members, and with the further exception of individuals with whom I consulted for their expertise in their respective fields, apart from advisory: Douglas Sloan, Professor of History of Education and Religion in Education at Teachers College, Susan Merrie Hellerer, Master of Divinity and seasoned leader of women's ritual circles, and Emmett Smith, experienced and well trained actor turned (Bank Street educated) teacher. As well, my data on Judith Scott's work at Satellite Academy, and the material on El Puente, being part of the public record, have not been disguised.

Schools were understandably reluctant to have visitors in a bonded, personal situation. I found, however, that once I had met the determinant individuals, this impediment evaporated. On the other hand, no one wanted a visitor in their advisory session when it was not really happening, a

situation which was often the case in schools where advisory met daily. This accounts for the number of different groups I visited at the Bronx site. Other circumstances, sometimes revealing, mitigated against planned visits to other schools. Interviews were not part of the initial plan, but developed as the most practical way of pursuing the study.

The interviews were semi-structured. I always asked for basic information about the size, schedule, and composition of the group, and, if it wasn't apparent, about the attitude of the school toward advisory. In many instances the interviewee was passionate on the subject of advisory or for other reasons launched into a monologue on the subject. In these cases, I simply listened, asking questions only to clarify where necessary. Some took me as a peer, or as someone doing work on a topic which they felt sorely needed attention. They wanted me to know their concerns, and sometimes had their own ideas about what I should know. In these instances there was some back and forth, and I sometimes explored with these teachers my particular concerns and developing insights. Sometimes interviewees took the stance of educating me about advisory (this was David and Larry, see Findings) on the presumption that I hadn't a clue as to what it is. In all cases I have read between the lines, taking statements at face value judiciously. Because early on it became apparent that the person of the teacher was a critical factor in the success of advisory groups, I have done my best to convey something of these individuals, as much as possible through their own words. I conducted a total of seven interviews with five teachers from four schools, two teachers being interviewed twice, and at length.

My actual observation of advisory groups besides my recollections from the previous year at NPSS, was in the end limited to one school in the Bronx. What follows is an overview of the study participants, both schools and teachers. More detailed information is found in the text in connection with the respective data. Except in one noted instance, the teachers who participated in this study are white. And except at the one private school, their students are predominantly, if not exclusively black and Latino. Also

except at one school, teachers are in the relationship of advisor to the students in their advisory groups.

We have already been introduced to North Park Secondary School (NPSS), an established, in fact prestigious public alternative school then in its tenth year. Having spent a term there as a student teacher, NPSS is the only instance in which I had any status as a group member, or knew the students. The advisory was Larry's, a combined 7th and 8th grade group. Larry is in his mid-40's and was in his seventh year as a teacher. Larry teaches humanities to two classes of seventh and eighth graders from which his advisory group is drawn. Group size is 13; meeting frequency, four times a week for one hour. Three of those meetings are scheduled in the middle of the day, one at 9 AM. In June of the following year (1996) I interviewed Larry to get his views on advisory in general, and as practiced at NPSS.

My first official data is from Restow, a private school, the only such institution included in this investigation. This highly selective school has a long-standing advisory tradition. I interviewed David, the middle school head. David is an English teacher in his 17th year of teaching at Restow, a Bank Street graduate who wrote a curriculum for advisory as part of his culminating project. At the time of our interview he had recently revised the middle school advisory curriculum. At Restow, advisory meets twice a week, once for an hour and a half, once for 40 minutes. Group size is 17 students. It was expected that I would visit David's sixth grade group, but the story unfolded elsewise.

My next subject was Lucy, with whom I had two lengthy interviews. Lucy is 27, and is a recent Bank Street graduate. She was a novice teacher at the Community Service Academy (CSA), a small alternative middle school in Manhattan, then in its second year of existence. Lucy teaches math and science to two classes of sixth and seventh graders. Her 10 member advisory group was drawn from these classes. Advisory at CSA meets once a week for 45 minutes. Advisory at CSA plays a different role than at other schools in this study as exemplified by the fact that teachers here are not in advisor-

advisee relationship with the students in their advisory groups. Lucy welcomed me to visit her group but vagaries of schedule (theirs and mine) mitigated against it.

It was at Community College High School that I was actually able to observe advisory. I include data on three of the groups I visited at this high school in the West Bronx. This includes observations of advisory sessions, and notes on conversations with these teachers. The school is the same size and age as NPSS, but its mission is specific to students who have had trouble in school elsewhere. To some extent this mission might be said to relate to NPSS as well, but here most students on the high school level have dropped out at least once, and the social dynamics of their lives seem to be at least an order of magnitude more problematic than those at NPSS. At CCHS advisory is called Family Group and meets every morning for an hour. Family Groups are comprised of a mix of students at all high school grade levels and do not change from year to year except for students leaving and coming in to the school. Group size is about 17 students.

The two high school groups I visited were Nancy's and Peter's (formerly Laurie's), and I also visited Naomi's middle school group. The major portion of my CCHS data, however, consists of my interviews with Laurie, a former teacher there. Laurie had been exceptional as a Family Group teacher, and had recently completed a paper on the subject. My interviews with her and with Lucy were taped, all others are from notes.

Circumstances dictated the balance between observation and interviews heavily in favor of the later. While it would have been valuable to have visited more sites, the depth provided by the interviews leads me to conclude that this is not necessarily a limitation of the study. My subject teachers are all "white folk" which is, if unfortunate, not unreflective of the faculty population in the schools represented. Nor, as is mentioned elsewhere, is the fact that the student population represented is uniformly "at risk"

unrepresentative. Advisory is more prevalent in schools serving this population. One real limitation of my study is the absence of student voices. But that would be another study. Another limitation, also requiring another study, is the lack of long term data on any group. One interesting and potentially valuable focus for such a study, as noted elsewhere, might be students' stories.

Advisory and Advisement

In the course of my first meeting with my not yet mentor, Frank Pignatelli, I described a bit of what I had seen in the advisory at my placement the previous spring, a bit of my personal sense of ecological concern, as well as my conviction that a reintegration of the sense of the sacred is essential to the well being of our society. I also talked about the connection I make between societal imbalance and adolescent alienation, and about ritual and coming of age. My premise was that middle school advisory presents an ideal opportunity to address, perhaps even to assuage or diminish the painful issues of adolescence. I was taken quite by surprise when he began to speak about and recommend readings on advisement as it is practiced at as part of teacher preparation Bank Street.

True, the two have a name in common, more or less. According to Webster's, "advisement", the graduate school term, means "careful consideration". "Advisory", on the other hand (taking the same part of speech, noun), is "a report giving information, as on the weather." Alternatively, as an adjective, it means "1. having or exercising power to advise 2. containing or giving advice." The dictionary definition of "advisement" reflects well what happens at Bank Street in what is often termed "Conference Group". The ill usage of "advisory" might be seen as reflective of the not quite thought out way in which it appears to be implemented in schools.

What was the basis of the connection my mentor made between these disparate developments from the French *avis* ? The two are almost as different as the dictionary would have us believe. But there are some parallels. I have chosen to begin by delineating the similarities, as well as the divergences between the two practices. In doing so I will be able, efficiently, to define and focus our view of advisory from a perspective which would be difficult to achieve otherwise. Another rationale for this comparison derives from the formulation of my study as one that will examine "the best

examples I can find." Advisement at Bank Street College is likely the best example of such a practice that can be found nationwide. And of particular relevance to my interest is the fact that the primary medium of conference group at Bank Street is stories.

On Wednesday afternoons from 4:30 to 6:30 PM throughout the school year, virtually the entire graduate school is sequestered in every possibly big enough room for their respective conference group meetings. These meetings are the heart of the three parts of advisement, advisement being the core of the College's approach to teacher education. The other two pieces are: 1) bi-weekly hour long individual conferences which the advisor holds with each member of his or her group; and 2) observation by the advisor of the student teacher in the classroom, approximately monthly.

The table (figure 1) is organized by "factors" of comparison. "Conference Group" refers specifically to that phenomenon at Bank Street College of Education. "Advisory" refers to the aggregate of schools in my study sample, to which we will soon be introduced. In my discussion of this comparison I rely to some extent on my own experience in conference group, and on the literature on advisement at Bank Street, as well as on information provided by my conference group advisor (a 33 year veteran at the college).

The first three items on the list can be taken together. If you have 6 students in a conference group for 120 minutes, each student will have 20 minutes, on average. If you have 12 students in a 40 minute net advisory that meets once a week, each student has 3 minutes, if a few don't dominate. If you have 17 students in an advisory that meets daily, but in fact doesn't really get going until half way through the period when enough people show up (we will hear more about this later), and doesn't really meet every day, say 120 minutes/week of group time, you get 7 minutes per student per week. This time factor indicates a clear limitation on the amount any individual can garner from the group situation in advisory in terms of their own issues quite unlike conference group which serves as a forum for group members to bring their issues to the table.

figure 1

Factor	Conference Group	Advisory
group size	5-7	12-20+
meeting frequency	weekly	varies: weekly, daily
meeting length	2 hours (+)	40'-1 hr. 1 school with double period.
duration of group	academic year	varies from semester to 4+ years.
clarity of focus or objective	clear	multi-purpose, extent of definition varies
teacher chooses to be advisor	yes	no except one school
students choose to be in a group	yes, by choosing the school	No. (see text)
leader also meets privately students	bi-weekly, never during group time	As needed; casually, sometimes during group time.
Institution provides training for advisors	In it's early years manditory weekly training on teacher's own time. Now voluntary, monthly, as needed for support.	Some schools had occaisional workshops in their early years. One had apprentice system. No training currently in evidence.
Institution provides support for advisors	yes	one has weekly advisors meetings, others casual.
Institution values these meetings	Yes. They are inviolable	Varies, but they are secondary.
racial/ethnic divergence between advisor and students	usually not	usually
students feel the time is theirs	yes	varies, mostly no
stories	plentiful	rare
discussion skills	pre-existing	need work
respect	generally	developing
confidentiality	yes	unreliable
relative anonymity	yes	no

Also, of course, the level of intimacy in a group of six is qualitatively different than in a group of 12, which differs again from a group of 17. Along with intimacy, not in a one to one correspondence, but bearing a closely parallel relationship regardless of the age of the participants, is a sense of safety. Safety includes those elements further down the list, respect and confidentiality, which would also tend to vary with group size.

Regarding objective, the goal at Bank Street is clear and unified, and is agreed upon by advisor and advisees: to become the best teachers we can be.

> The college itself is a "convinced community"; the range of variation falls within a clearly defined developmental and humanistic value system. Furthermore, students are likely to select the program with some idea of what they are choosing." (Shapiro 1991)

There are several elements here. One is considerable unity of value and view within the college community, the advisors themselves. Another is an acceptance of that view, perhaps a desire to be initiated into it, but at the very least an openness to it on the part of the students. Another is the codification of the whole around the notion of reflection. And yet another is the specific and essential reference to value system.

While each of the middle and high school teachers interviewed would define the goal of advisory somewhat differently, as would their respective school administrations, the range of variation is not wide. The difference here is in the clarity of goal within each school, as compared to that of the College. Teacher's views on how to accomplish their goals, their sense of where to start, both in terms of where their students are at, and the tools available to them as individuals may vary but their views on what makes a good human would likely fall into no wider a range than Bank Street advisors would agree to for a good teacher.

Lucy at CSA says her goal for advisory is "character development" and also to help her students learn how to discuss things, and to see that there can be more than one right answer to a moral dilemma. But at the same time advisory in her school is seen as a forum for the students; her students see it

as *their* time. Lucy wishes her school would state its objectives for advisory; when the groups are shuffled mid-year the explanation is "so that students can get to know other teachers better." At CCHS where advisory is called Family Group, there is perhaps a clearer formulation, if we all think of a family as filling the same roles, that is. But it is no less multi-dimensional and complex than at Lucy's CSA. This is not to say that the purpose at the college is not multi-dimensional and complex, but it is not so wide as to include study skills, sex education, school news, and "who stole Nadine's bookbag?" along with self esteem and more. A major difference is that the students are not bought into the goal of advisory (whatever it is) by virtue of their being at their particular school, as they are at Bank Street. As Laurie says near the beginning of my first interview with her, everything has to be created. NPSS may come the closest to being a "convinced community" by virtue of having a faculty with relatively uniform political views. But despite the best efforts of their teachers, the student body remains more or less immune to these views.

Often in conference group the advisor will ask a student to talk about something they have done in their classroom, something that she thinks will be of value to the group to hear, or to the student to share. The advisor is able to do this because she meets regularly with group members, and observes them in the field. The middle or high school advisor is probably aware of his students schoolwork, but that in itself may pose a barrier for rapport, witness the interview with Larry at North Park Secondary School. He does not have the luxury of time for regular meetings with his advisees. Even at Restow, the one well endowed private school in my sample, students routinely meet privately with their advisor only once per marking period. .

The combined factors of institutional support, training, and valuing of the group meeting are patently the key elements to the success, or lack thereof, of the advisory groups. At Bank Street, where advisment flourishes, nothing else happens on Wednesday afternoons. Absence is grave. At CCHS some advisory times conflict with Roundtables, keeping the advisor and

some students out, sometimes there is gym, sometimes the advisor must meet with a parent. And always many students are late. New teachers, once routinely placed with an experienced FG teacher for their first year, are now longer trained and so routinely do not use the time well. The other key element is the character of the teacher. As David from Restow said, you may have someone who is an excellent math teacher and not good as an advisor, or not interested. At his school teachers may teach an extra course in lieu of being an advisor. In the other schools it comes with the job, like it or not. Likewise, it is not a factor in hiring. (Lucy and Larry both attested to this. Quoth Larry: "If you find someone who can stand up in front of the class and teach them the math, you're not going to quibble about how well they can do advisory".[1] At the college presumably one would not seek a job to which advisement is central if one were not interested in advisement.

Then there is the matter of student choice. In choosing Bank Street the matriculant knows that she is choosing advisement, though probably with only a dim notion of what it is.[2] Nevertheless in matriculating she agrees to it, in fact agrees to pay rather a sizable sum for it, and knows as well that the institution values it highly. One might well choose to go to Bank Street because of advisement, or choose to go elsewhere to avoid it, or at least to avoid its high price tag.

Choices about where to attend middle school and where to attend graduate school are hardly comparable. Nevertheless, the schools in this study are schools of choice, to some degree. One, like the College, is even a private institution. But middle school students at Restow have mostly been there since they were small, too small to have chosen their schools. At Restow the "House" function is melded with the daily pattern of the elementary classroom, being more or less invisible, and in the high school

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[1] Math teachers seem to get the rap here, but note that Laurie, my star witness, was a math teacher, as is Lucy.

[2] According to the college's Director of Admissions (conversation 7/96) this *should* be made clear during the interview. It is definitely in the guidelines for faculty doing the interviewing. Whether students actually *hear* it is another question.

the time slot is most often used elsewise. It is only for the three years of middle school that House has a special identity and function. Not likely to be a reason to choose a K-12 school, regardless of one's point of entry. Some students do enter in the middle school, but it is unlikely, considering the elite culture of the school, that the incidence of "House" is anyone's determining factor in selecting that school.

At North Park Secondary School (NPSS) the majority of the students have also come through the three elementary schools that feed into the upper school, though in this case students do actually change schools (if not school buildings) so one might assume that some choice is made. But in spite of its prominence in the schedule (4 hours/week), advisory there has not played a major role, at least in recent years. It is unlikely to be a deciding factor. In other words, a student might choose NPSS without choosing advisory. The Community Service Academy (CSA) has advisory one period per week, also unlikely to be influential in school selection. Community College High School (CCHS) on the other hand gives major importance to what it calls Family Group, but it is less a school of choice than a school of last resort.

What can go on in a group depends considerably on the manner of one's being a member of it. There is a world of difference between having to be in school and therefor having to be in this group; and putting oneself into debt so one can be there.

The last item on the table is "relative anonymity." By this I mean the distance between the group and the important problems with which a student may be wrestling. The questions, problems, or successes that graduate students bring to conference group all relate to the classroom in which they are teaching, or student teaching. No one else in their conference group is part of that classroom, nor, likely, even of that school. This is vastly different than advisory for adolescents. Whatever else their problems and concerns, and they may be legion, adolescents are peer focused. And their peer group is largely in their classroom, certainly in their school, probably right there in their advisory.

An interesting sidenote on the matter of anonymity may be gleaned from the interview with Lucy in which she refers to DeSisto, a residential therapeutic school for adolescents where she had taught previously. There also the situation has this useful characteristic of distance because the students, regardless of how long their stay at the school, are outside their normal home/school culture.

This brings me to story. The advisor at Bank Street can count on a ready stream of stories. In fact part of her task may involve ensuring equal time. To the advisor of adolescents, stories are a rare and precious occurrence. Both Lucy and Laurie speak specifically to how valuable it is when a student comes in with a problem in the moment. When something is brought before the group live, even by the teacher (Lucy getting too much change when buying oranges), advisory takes on a life that it tends otherwise to lack. But it appears that students only bring these stories when they are too immediate to contain. They do not, as graduate students do, anticipate the opportunity to mull over a given problem, select what they hope to have the opportunity to discuss, and bring it along in their minds, should their problem be pressing enough to warrant the attention of the group that week.

David
Restow

As I have mentioned, the schools included in this study were selected primarily on the basis of excellence in advisory. Restow, a well endowed, prestigious Manhattan private school known for excellence, has had the institution it calls "House" since its inception in 1919. This school provided an opportunity to examine advisory in a situation where not only is it a long-standing institution, but where resources are adequate. Any problems in advisory at Restow could not be attributed to overworked staff having to do more with less, a common refrain in the public school system.

The first evidence I had of this adequacy of resources was the astonishing rapidity with which my messages were relayed, and phone calls returned. It took a number of calls to be directed to "the person to talk to about House", David, the middle school head. Along the way, I was told that "he just rewrote that [House] curriculum and he's a brilliant advisor." In fact, David has probably spent more time thinking about, and doing, middle school advisory than any individual I could have found in New York. Ten years ago, his sixth year teaching English in Restow's middle school, he was a student at Bank Street where he wrote, as part of the Directed Essay required for his degree, a curriculum for sixth grade "House," and his passion for this medium has not flagged. When we met, David spoke on the subject of House for our full allotment of time without prompting by questions, and without much opportunity for them either. I took notes on our meeting and have reported on them, reconstructed them and quoted from them in what follows.

A dark-haired, solidly built, unattractive man (he describes himself as ugly) in his late thirties, David began by providing a bit of the history of House at Restow. Originally the school's progressive approach to education had no classes, just labs. They had "the House, the Lab, and the Assignment." The House advisor was like the homeroom teacher, serving the function of

checking in, keeping track of where students were with their assignments. Eventually the school started to have classes, but they kept House for its guidance function. In Restow's middle school, House now meets twice a week, once for about an hour and a half and once for 40 minutes, Monday and Friday respectively. In the lower school, classrooms are self-contained. The House function is not broken out, while in the high school, House is more or less like homeroom, with the time usually given over to something else. But, says David,

> In the middle school we need the time for kids to bond with a single adult. Kids this age need this. Also this is the first line of communication with parents.

Our meeting was to be prefatory to my being privileged to sit in on one or several sessions of David's advisory. David, like others, expressed concern about the effect of the presence of an outsider in what was a bonded group, but readily agreed to this preliminary meeting with me. After Christmas his group would soon be done with the self-evaluation process in which they were presently engaged. This process involved him in individual conferences with students, and therefore not much was presently going on to be observed.

In the first year of teaching at Restow a new teacher is teamed with an experienced advisor, shares their group. "It's hard for someone to be a trained House advisor," requiring as it does, skills David describes as being those of a psychologist and a pastor. "So it's good to be with someone." One distinguishing feature of Restow in terms of advisory is that "not every teacher does it. People have tried it and been bad at it, or you might be a good math teacher and just not be interested." If you do not have a House and its concomitant individual advisory responsibilities, you teach an additional course. Also, advisors meet weekly and "talk kids." These meetings are in addition to weekly faculty meetings.

So, we do indeed see a situation of institutional support which should be conducive to good advisory, though it is curious that the weekly meetings of advisors are stated to consist entirely of talk about kids. Talk about the group process of advisory would seem to be desirable as well. Certainly, not requiring teachers to lead house should be to everyone's advantage.

Ten years ago, when he wrote his essay, David characterized the situation of House at Restow as follows:

> House replaces a course. It "meets" once a week, but no one at school seems sure what goes on, what could go on, or what should go on during House time. The phrase "House Curriculum" can be explosive. The suggestion that certain things should be happening during House time is seen in some quarters to be a naked attack on teacher autonomy. Some teachers believe that any structuring of House time will keep them from doing what they feel is right for their students.
>
> (name withheld, 1987)

In a footnote he goes on to say

> For this reason, House is run differently in every classroom in the school. Nevertheless, the administration remains committed to the idea of House.

In promoting David, with his passion for House, to an administrative position, they have evidenced this commitment.

Perhaps since it was going on at the time, David began by describing how the House self-evaluation process works. "Kids are given the report form to fill out for themselves, including comments. If I disagree with their evaluation I will speak with the student, otherwise I write comments reinforcing the student's self-perception." This process would be taking up weeks of House time. I didn't give it much thought until later when I realized that this report was strictly a House, not an academic report. It could be constructive to deal with a student's overall report in this manner, but it seems overmuch evaluation for so slim a margin of the week. But perhaps, as we shall see, this is not quite an accurate reflection of time allocation.

David listed an impressive battery of content: providing a firm moral base; enabling the child; supporting the child; providing conversation on ethical issues; addressing apathy and skepticism; participation in mass culture; self. He also said he spends significant time on "study skills and organization, strategies". Every few weeks he'll ask how they're doing with their work. Occasionally, just before a test, he'll give a study hall "because they're not going to focus if they're worrying about a big test." He says

> Sometimes we discuss ethical issues directly. I will show a movie, discuss TV or use reading as a catalyst, or school issues. There may be community service projects -- if that's your bag [you, the advisor]. If not, don't bother.

Note David's inclusion of apathy and skepticism, the only mention I heard of these qualities in my field work.

Says David,

> There are certain rules:
>
> - Absolute confidentiality. Nothing we say here is going outside, otherwise there is a break in trust. (We might talk about other teachers.) No secrets from Mom and Dad though.
> - Lack of censorship -- you're allowed to say what you want except for things that are directly hurtful, said to be hurtful. Bad language is OK.
> - Whomever's speaking has the floor, you don't interrupt, you put up your hand. That's the starting point. Or when it gets volatile we might have to go back to that.
> - The corollary to this: whoever has the floor gets your eyes -- eyes up and on the speaker. I will not have you sleeping, reading, doing a puzzle -- so, desk away.

The fierce tone of this description of rules, accelerating as it proceeds, is in marked contrast to the standard approach as David articulates it in his paper.

> Inventing the rules for House should, in my opinion, be one of the

first tasks for a House group. If the teacher simply 'lays down' these rules, she loses a chance to involve the children in the structure of the House, and may even alienate them.

Understandably he does not want people sleeping or reading, but if the time were engagingly spent, this should not be a major problem. The phrase, "I will not have you . . ." is particularly severe in the context of a simple recounting of rules to a stranger.

> One time in five I will bring in bagels. I will let them plan something, a movie, if I think it's good. We have a House dinner.
>
> [I begin the year] with games to bring us together as a group. In winter or early spring we might do the following exercise: "If the person I am thinking of were a (dog, movie star, sport, color...) they would be _____ [particular kind]. They have to know each other pretty well, essences.

The House dinner is a benign school tradition serving a healthy bonding function. The game, on the other hand, strikes me as bizarre and inappropriate. Drawing analogies is a developmentally appropriate skill to foster, but labeling of peers is hardly to be encouraged under any circumstances.

Discussing the qualities of a good advisor, David says "the good ones" have

- Tremendous force of personality. Pre-adolescence is like being stranded on a dessert island. There is a narrative. Either it is *Lord of the Flies,* or *Swiss Family Robinson.* I *run* my House.
- A firm ground in yourself and your own personal core of ethics.
- This should come first. You must adore the kids of the age group. If you combine charisma and moral strength -- the rest is training.

and:

> Not everyone can do this. You have to be willing to sit in a circle with nine to fourteen [adolescents] and bare your deepest soul.

Without disagreeing with David's depiction of the mores of adolescence, it seems important to at least keep in mind that the goal, ultimately, is to turn over responsibility. Preparation for this would involve the sharing of power and control over what goes on.

But most disturbing is the following emphatic assertion. David says

> I fight evil. Kids question me when I describe this as what I do, but I really believe this is what I do. I fight evil.

On top of this, David refers to himself as an absolutist. And yet, he says the most important thing is "true dialogue." In his paper he says:

> Many of the activities I have outlined as part of a House curriculum involve dialogue (also called discussions or conversations) among the students and teachers in the class. These activities should be conducted as true dialogues; each member of the group, including the teacher, must be open to having her ideas refined and developed by the others.

This is a point well taken, but is it something an absolutist can, in fact, do? David offered no examples of dialogues, no concerns about which his students had engaged with him, nor even specific topics students have found compelling over the years.

David is an English teacher. In his essay he writes

> When I write an assignment for Sixth Grade English I am constrained, to a certain extent, by the set curriculum. I must make some attempt to cover Greek Mythology this winter. In designing a curriculum for House, these shackles are broken. I can rely entirely on my knowledge of the children's developmental and social needs, and on my own philosophy of education.

Knowing that these are the words of an absolutist, we may be justifiably concerned about the concentration of power. That he takes great pleasure in House may now appear in a dubious light. Is it possible that House is so appealing to David precisely because he is unfettered by the restraints of academic curriculum? And if he has written a curriculum for his teachers,

are they then obligated to follow his estimation of what is needed? I was not able to explore these questions with David. And while the old graduate school paper was freely given, a gander at the curriculum was not considered.

In that paper, David summarized "several implied directives for a 'good' Sixth Grade House curriculum." I quote the entire list (changing bullets to numbers for convenience of reference).

1. The curriculum should enable the child "in the tool world." It should provide her with experiences which will increase rather than stifle her nascent sense of industry.
2. The curriculum should provide support for those children who continue to think in concrete operational terms, without holding back those whose formal operational structures are already in place.
3. The curriculum should expose the children to conversation on ethical issues, among themselves and, where possible, with adults who have achieved postconventional levels of moral development.
4. The curriculum should address issues of apathy and the role of skepticism directly.
5. The curriculum should encourage children to think about their participation in mass culture, without passing judgment on it.
6. The curriculum should be sensitive to the children's social dynamic and self perceptions. It should examine these ideas without bias.
7. The curriculum should "inculcate just sentiments".
8. The curriculum should leave room for individual children to exercise their individual areas of excellence.

The first item on the list is of considerable interest in the context of the larger, call them ecological, issues informing my perspective. It is notable that this item, "Enabling children in the tool world," is first on the list. It is also notable that in my talks with David, in his paper, and in my other interviews and observations throughout this study, I saw no evidence of this genre of enabling. I saw no evidence of hand work of any kind with the exception of the paintings done by Judith Scott's seniors, discussed near the end of this paper.

The second and the last items are strictly pedagogical, three (3, 4, 7) of the items are ethical, though 5 might be included here as well; one item (6) covers the social emotional realm. I disagree with the inclusion of "no bias" in items

5 and 6. I think it is essential to examine the ethical dimensions of children's social dynamic with vigorous upholding of standards of kindness, fairness and decency. Certainly the cruelty sometimes characteristic of the "social dynamic" of this age group deserves examination in light of a compassionate bias. And children this age are frequently in need of reality-checks to their self-perceptions, which are often grossly negative. Participation in "mass culture" too deserves consideration as a moral issue, and also as it informs self-perception, especially of girls' self image. Consideration might also be given to the fact that it is at this age that children begin to have enough spending money that they become players in the economy.

One other item on the list draws my attention: the word apathy. In my initial conversations on the phone with David, in our meeting, and in his paper, this word came up repeatedly but nowhere else in my study. The last time I heard this word used with regularity was as a high school student in the '60's. My association with this malaise is with our coming of age on the cusp of a world become unfathomably scaleless, and destructive, self destructive in the same impossible order of magnitude. Meanwhile, adults around us continued the pattern of their lives in molds that fit a world which no longer existed. We had no words for what we knew. David would like to fight apathy as an evil. But it may well be a normal response to the scale of our societal destructiveness. (Macy 1983) Children and society might benefit rather more from the opportunity to voice the perceptions and anxieties that give rise to this malaise, than from exhortations to 'go out and do something' or "get a better attitude." For more on this see Macy (1983) and Seed (1988).

* * * * *

There is a coda to my consultation with David. I had met with him in December and was to begin observing his group after the holiday break. But I was unable to arrange it. Finally in early March I succeeded in reaching David (from a pay phone). What follows, verbatim, are notes written during and

immediately following our conversation.

I've been dodging your phone calls and there's a reason for this. There's stuff going on in my advisory that is really difficult and I'm dealing with it in ways that I wouldn't recommend to anyone -- making contracts, having them do homework just so they'll allow the rest of the group to function.

There are a number of kids who are not self-reflective. Not only do they resist it for themselves but they don't want anyone else to do it. So if I had an experienced teacher who had been doing advisory for ten years, then I might recommend these techniques but I wouldn't recommend them to someone young and starting out. I am not happy about using them.

If you and I had been co-teaching advisory from the beginning there would be no problem about you being there but since I am going to be taking these kids down, doing things I am not happy about doing, not comfortable about doing, I don't want to add to that that I am doing this in front of a total stranger, having someone watch.

I am having problems I have never seen before. I did an exercise, an activity and I asked them to write about why they had participated in the activity in the way that they had and I got responses that were, well I'll show them to you and I'll talk to you about this in more detail but they said -- there are four of them -- that they did what they did because they enjoy subverting my activities. Basically, if there's a choice between getting a quarter and a dime, they'll take the dime just so someone else doesn't get it. They'll take less just to make someone else unhappy.

I've talked to people here, I've told them I don't know what to do because I've got this problem and there's this lady who wants to come in, who's going to come in and watch. And I'm doing things I wouldn't recommend to anybody.

Perhaps the strong tone in which David recounted to me his rules for advisory was a result of tensions already present in the group. Perhaps the causation is the reverse of this. I had no opportunity to observe him in action. Nor did he allow a way out of the dilemma my interest presented by offering me the opportunity to visit another group. I can only surmise based on the language of my notes and of his writing. Between the lines of our phone call might be heard a plaint of the decline of civilization. But we could be witnessing the comeuppance of an absolutist.

The following Fall I phoned the school to verify the number of students in a House. I was told that David is no longer there.

Lucy
Community Service Academy

> Because they're growing up, they're entering,...they're no longer just in their Mom's world, they become more worldly or something. They have to enlarge their perspective and so they have someplace to be able to talk about this perspective, so things aren't happening to them, so they can happen to things. And know that their actions -- because finally their actions have consequences, consequences not necessarily being negative, but that they can impact the world and that everyone else's decisions impact them, and some are targeted at them.
> *Lucy*

> They like Advisory, it's their time, they think it's cool.
> *Lucy*

Next I interviewed Lucy, a teacher at the Community Service Academy (CSA). CSA, located in District 3 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, is a small alternative middle school in its second year of existence. CSA provides one 45 minute period of advisory per week for its students. Each advisory group has ten students, combined 6th and 7th graders. Groups are composed of students within each of the two houses comprising the school.

Unlike the other schools considered here, students at CSA are not in delineated advisor/advisee relationships with their advisory teacher. Also distinct from the other schools, at CSA advisory is secondary to the community service component which is part of the school's defining mission. The student population here is similar to that of NPSS with a predominance of black students. Block scheduling and mixed age groupings are the norm at both schools.

My selection of Lucy to be part of this study was on a different basis than that of the other teachers in this study. The others taught at schools recommended for excellence in advisory, whereas I knew that as she began this, her first year of teaching at CSA, Lucy had been in a panic about doing advisory. Lucy is a Harvard educated 27 year old native of Seattle. She teaches combined 6th and 7th grade math and science and is a Bank Street graduate. Previously, Lucy taught at the DeSisto School, a residential therapeutic school for troubled adolescents. At DeSisto, Lucy had been

responsible for daily advisory type meetings in which

> people cried all the time, or people got angry, or people did various emotions (you can say it that way) and it really was a "safe" place and confidentiality and I sort of expected something similar to that was expected for advisory, and it's not. And I didn't know how to set that tone. I could pick up on it but I didn't think I could create it from nothing and that's what I imagined advisory was supposed to be. I mean, not as much as that. Not as severe, but more severe than it is.

Any one piece of her text is likely to bear, indirectly, if not directly, on more than one aspect of my investigation. Nevertheless I have separated the material into two sections. The first, longest section gives us information about Lucy's advisory and her approach. We see here the primary importance of what she herself brings to this forum. The school's conception and treatment of advisory is the focus of the second section. I had expected that the two interviews I taped with Lucy would be prefatory to observing her advisory group but a combination of factors -- schedule, trips, test prep, (not issues of confidentiality) mitigated against it. Less a large number of "like"s, the transcription faithfully conveys Lucy's words.

I.

After answering my questions about the size and composition of the groups, Lucy immediately became engaged in describing dynamics.

> They are strong girls and not particularly strong boys. One boy is very strong. There are three girls that speak out a lot and one boy who is off, like half the time he is sitting on the table or I ask him to leave because he's just not . . ., he can't . . ., it's not a forum for him. He also has a speech impediment. I'm not sure if that plays into it. Two of the boys are academically very weak, one of them is socially weak, one is academically *extremely* low and usually gets excited about the topics and wants to say something. The third is academically fairly low but doesn't apply himself is part of the reason, and he is socially -- hot. He's the biggest boy in the school. He doesn't get excited about

having things to say but he always has something to say so he plays a strong role and there are three girls that dominate overall, two in particular.

Lucy goes on later to speak of the strong girls being

> very controlling. They just won't be quiet. I think it makes it so some kids don't want to talk. I think [the boy who is frequently asked to leave] might want to talk if those girls weren't there and if there were some kids that he felt like he could relate to, but I don't think he feels like he relates to any of them. And looking at him, I don't think he really does. There is no one who is his level emotionally.

No one else with whom I spoke delineated the dynamics of their group in relation to the specific characteristics of its members. Laurie speaks of one group she had that was divided along music lines, but here Lucy is concerned with the social and academic strengths and weaknesses of individual group members as they affect the participation of individuals and as the gestalt of the whole is thereby determined. That this is her first advisory group is one explanation for this. Also, at ten students, Lucy's group is smaller than the others (NPS6 has 13, Restow and CCHS, 17). In any case, her concern as advisory leader is clearly influenced by her attunement to these conflicting individual pressures on the whole. That she speaks of no one being on the emotional level of a particular student is particularly impressive. This kind of articulation reflects a mode of thinking about students that is conducive to effective advisory groups, especially if it gains a voice in the process of setting up the groups.

Awareness of another kind is seen below in Lucy's musings about desks. In describing her advisory, she reveals her sense of its defining elements.

> They're allowed to eat -- they'll tell you about it, it's an important thing. And they can bring food. [This is a defined school policy regarding advisory.] I usually bring fruit for all of them but different teachers do different things in terms of what they bring. Some teachers have people sign up but I don't have them sign up. I say the

rule for food is they either share with nobody or share with everybody who asks. And we sit, they rearrange the desks and we all sit in a circle. But they like to have desks in front of them, they don't like to sit with just a chair. Sometimes I've said, "No desks today." I don't really know why, but well, especially if for any reason the period is shortened, then I always say, "no desks" because we have to put them back and that's a waste of time but I also am just sort of intrigued by their need for desks. Sometimes there are two kids at a desk but they like to have that place to lean on. I think it's also like a barrier. So it's safe.

The food and the circle are elements that define advisory, that differentiate it, set it apart from other class periods during the school day. Without specifying that these elements serve this defining function, Lucy shows by her mention of them at the outset of our discussion that she is aware, at least subliminally, of their role. Later, in the course of our second interview, Lucy said that her students like rituals, for example doing "Mad Math" in class, "that's how they know it's math class as opposed to science class." We discussed the difference between ritual and routine. Asked further about ritual Lucy said

> I guess I do think of it as something that's like a habit, it's something that will always happen at the same time or at the same place, whatever it is, whether it's that we always sit in a circle or we always eat in advisory or we always play this one particular game. Like, them knowing how to do something - they like that, they like to be pros and feel like the situation is controlled.

Again Lucy shows herself attuned and responsive to structures that make her students feel comfortable.

After telling me at the outset about their need for desks, she goes on to say

> They sit really close together. The circle is so tight that I have to ask them to make room -- like if a kid comes in late, they won't move to let the kid in. I have to ask them. And also they make [the circle]

right by the door and I sit right by the door. I'm in a chair, I never have a desk but they usually get me a chair and they don't put a desk front in it they just put me in the chair. They're all in sort of like a quarter of a circle, maybe, but usually then they kind of fold in around me so it makes it a full circle.

From the way Lucy tells us this, we can see that she has not dictated to her students any more specifics about how to arrange the desks than minimally necessary. Although she doesn't articulate it here, she is giving her students control. The other salient point is the impressive level of student engagement reflected in the tight circle which folds in around her.

Several other characteristics of Lucy's routine are noteworthy. When I ask how the advisory starts, she tells me

> They arrange the desks and I sort of do whatever. It's solid classes up 'till then and they're not in my classroom right before I don't think, I can't remember if they are or they aren't but I usually have some papers to put away or whatever so I do that and give them about 5 minutes to sort of wind down, which may be a waste of time but it lets me initially prepare and them sort of get organized and feel like this is what we're doing and get some of that craziness out of them.
>
> And then I sit down and I usually have to tell them to move a little bit to let somebody through, whether it's me because I can't get into the circle or someone who has come late and then I ask for their attention and then I say, "Does anybody have anything they want to bring up? And then I say, "I have a topic for today." And usually, somewhere in there they say, "Can we play the game?" and I say, "At the end." That's the ritual.

Lucy expresses doubt about whether her transition procedure wastes time, but innately knows that the extra time serves to allow the group, as well as herself, to be present to the different space of advisory.

The game to which she refers is another example of Lucy allowing her group to do something they like, and to have control, as well as a unique

characteristic of this group.

> The thing we did in the beginning of the year which they are totally obsessed with -- you change three things about yourself. I might take out my earring, I might change the part in my hair, I might uncuff my pants. I go out of the room and I do that and I come back in and you have to say the three things [that I changed] and they are obsessed with it, they want to play every time. We did that the third or forth week of Advisory and now they want to play every time and they call it "the game" like that's "The Game." . . . . So, every week one person goes out of the room. They put the desks back. Someone goes out of the room, makes three changes, and comes back in and they say what they think. So that's one that they like, that they *love* and we did that right in the very beginning because that was supposed to be a "get to know you" type thing.

Lucy found a useful place for this activity into by integrating it into the closing transition. She can allow it to happen weekly without disruption to the ongoing agenda, and it serves as a motivator for a fast clean-up.

Another practical innovation that has positive management implications beyond its immediate domain is evidenced in the particular food Lucy has come to provide for her group.

> It started out that I brought pretzels but that made them thirsty so that wasn't so good, but still it was quick, easy, cheap. But I decided that I was going to bring oranges one day. I decided because somebody else was talking about health stuff in her Advisory because she feels the kids aren't healthy, they don't eat healthy foods, so she brought oranges and they talked about Vitamin C and then she brought carrots and they talked about Beta Carotene. I saw a kid with an orange and I thought that's a great idea because it keeps their hands occupied and they can focus better. I have two trash cans and I put them in the middle of the circle and they shoot at the trash cans and they make it and they know they have to clean up afterwards. The last three

> minutes are spent cleaning up and putting back the desks and they sweep and everything, throw the trash away.

Lucy's level of engagement with her work is demonstrated here. Seeing a student with an orange, an idea clicks, one that not only solves the thirst problem, but which provides engagement of hands to help focus. Not daunted by the mess problem of oranges, quite in stride, Lucy puts the trash cans in the center of the circle to shoot at. She demonstrates a relaxed confidence, and a good sense of fun.

The transitional room rearrangement at the beginning and end of the period, the oranges, and "The Game," are customs, be they routines or rituals, that are identifiable and desirable to both students and teacher. A picture emerges of a group that has a welcome, workable and enjoyable pattern. Before moving to an examination of what happens, or what Lucy would like to see happening within the container, or framework she has established, one other example of her multi-functional approach is worth noting. In the following paragraph she shows how she intends to accomplish one of her goals for advisory through a rule. She says that during regular classes they have to ask permission and sign a pass to go to the bathroom, and then sign back in.

> In Advisory, they still have to sign -- they each get one trip to the bathroom, just go, sign out the pass and go. But you don't have to ask because I didn't want discussion to be interrupted and I wanted to establish a sort of trust thing. Also a lot of times they want to get a drink of water or wash their hands because they're eating. Just go and come back. I think they need to learn how to enter and leave a room without being disruptive. They don't know how to do that. They walk in from the bathroom and talk to every desk they pass. So, I want to see if I can establish that, I don't know if it's working, for the most part I think it is.

With one rule, disruption is diminished, trust developed, and an inappropriate behavior pattern (hopefully) modified.

Having established a framework, what goes in it? At the beginning of the year, Lucy asked her students what topics they wanted to talk about and "came up with a list of nothing. I mean there were some things, but nothing that seemed valuable to me." Nevertheless she often begins by asking if there is anything they want to discuss. This, she says, usually results in them wanting to talk about movies. But "I steer it after it gets started." She says

> I try to think of topics that they'll think are interesting and also that will give me insight to them and also I'm trying to let them think of values, kind of, but I'm not trying to give them values. I just want them to think about that different people either respond to something in the same way as they do or in a different way and that there might be more than one right answer. I try not to give my own value of what's right and wrong though. I try to let them sort it out. . . . I don't think I give them any advice. I think I'm taking the approach of character development.

Note that Lucy seems comfortable with "value," both in freely using the word, and in leaving values open for exploration. Also note Lucy's intention to gain insight into her advisees. Neither my field work nor my reading revealed other examples of this as an articulated goal, though it seems a worthy one. Benefits to students could be significant albeit indirect. On the other hand, the literature, as well as some of my other subjects did mention that they want their students to see that others hold differing views. Lucy is specific in articulating the pedagogical value and developmental appropriateness of advisory in this respect. She recounts a particular advisory session for example. Lucy had been undercharged when she bought oranges. Realizing this, she went back into the store and told the shopkeeper. He said "That's OK, have a nice day." Lucy related this incident to her advisory group and asked them what they would have done if they were undercharged.

> There was a kid who would have turned back in the oranges, would have gone back in, because he said "that way, then the next time if

> you don't have a quarter, then it will be like, "That's okay, come back later and give us a quarter," developing that relationship. I thought it was important for the kids to hear that another kid might do that. And there are some kids who are like, "I'd run because they might catch me and I just made a dollar." And, while I don't want to encourage that value, I want them to know, hearing other kids ideas so that they're not . . ., that there might be five different rights for a situation. They didn't have to go back into the store with the oranges. That's fine. But it's also fine that the kid went back. And, the advantages of that which they may not have thought of and since they are learning to think of all of those perspectives....

I discuss the value of the varying moral stance of teachers later in the paper. Here, it is important to note Lucy's statement that "there might be five different rights for a situation."

Continuing to define her goals for advisory, she says she would like to teach her students to discuss and to listen. These are goals with obvious academic function, besides being useful underlayment for the accomplishment of other advisory goals. In connection with this, she mentions the value of student stories. Lucy thinks her students need to improve their story telling skills. In addition, she would like to have more live stories.

> I don't want to wish any problem on a kid but I'd like some kid to come in...[with a problem], any problem. Like maybe they just got in a fight and they're heated up or something, some kid is crying. Something that's right then and now, because I don't think it can happen, I don't think a kid will bring an issue to it because it hasn't been . . . an issue hasn't come to it by itself.

She wants the kids to "hear each other's dilemmas and also to hear some opinions about things that aren't, Who should be president? or, Which is greater, this number or that number?" In other words, Lucy wants advisory to inhabit the personal realm. To accomplish this, and to further other goals,

Lucy thinks that she

> would like more intimacy in advisory. I mean, I would like it to be a more intimate place for them than it is. I think removing the desks from the circle is one way [to accomplish that]. I mean I know that's silly, but I really decided this week that that was important. 'Cause they were in a square this week. They put them in a square. That made me feel like they were hiding, like it wasn't an open thing. I don't need that much more intimacy but I just need a little bit more so that respect is more natural.

Here, Lucy makes a most interesting connection. When she says she just needs a little bit more intimacy so that respect is more natural, the presumption is that people reveal themselves more readily in an intimate situation. To Lucy, ever a divergent thinker, it follows that when people are more revealing of themselves, there is a natural increase in respect. Here we again see Lucy move toward a situation in which form and function unite. In art (and I hope we have no argument about including teaching as an art), when form and function meld, in other words where form carries or makes meaning, the work is powerful. Much of what Lucy has told us about her approach carries this multi-purpose unity.

This is not as esoteric as is sounds. In fact, here Lucy may have found a way to approach the problem which both she and her students see as most central, and most intractable. When I pushed Lucy to discuss environmental matters, a different concern emerged, the issue of violence. She sees violence as including a whole spectrum of problems. These include respect, cursing, "attitude," and fighting, as well as random violence in society.

> If you wanted them to have an issue that they took to heart, it would be violence. I don't think they feel like they can do anything about it. And I think the thought of doing something about it would be incredibly overwhelming to them. It's a crisis at a point where they think it's completely beyond their, out of their hands. . . . .

A kid told a story about being in an ice cream store with their little sister. It was two little sisters and two big sisters. And one little sister ordered ice cream and the big sister said, "no" but then the little sister ordered ice cream again and the man served her, and she didn't have the money, that's why she had said no and she (the big sister) said to the man who served them: "I didn't order for her and I can't pay for her and you just served her and I had said, "no," and he didn't respond. It wasn't a rational thing and the only way that she knew how to approach it, as she said, "so I got an attitude." That's a survival skill for them. They think they need that as a skill in general, and I think they do.

And also fighting is another one that they need. I think that kids need to know how to fight. They need to have some sense of physical strength and physical ability on the street outside of the school. . . . . I think they need to feel like school is a safe place and we don't have fighting in school, but I don't have a problem with them knowing how to fight. I want them to come to school the next day, if they have to fight to do that. The same thing with hopping the token stalls when their pass gets stolen. Their passes get stolen by various people on the street. They take it out to show it and somebody walks up and snags it. So then they hop the turnstile and they don't think that's bad because they've got to come to school and their pass got stolen. And I agree.

Here we have more examples of Lucy's postconventional, or perhaps relational, morality. But I would like to return to respect, or the lack of respect, a widely acknowledged problem in this age group. Lack of respect might well be understood as a basic element in a range of societal incidences of violence. If Lucy is correct, and I think she is, in deducing that increased intimacy will cause a natural increase in respect, we have a strong argument for the enhancement of an intimate, personal atmosphere in advisory groups.

II.

When I asked Lucy how she had moved beyond the state of panic she had been in the start of the school year concerning advisory, she explained that some advisory sessions met in her room during her free periods and she had had the opportunity to observe these sessions. In particular she mentioned observing

> this guy who was just coming in to do an advisory group. He had them fill out a survey, of favorite movies and stuff, and then he brought back that information and they played a name game but he didn't know their names and they played the "knot game" where you hold hands and make a knot. Only the girls would do it, the boys wouldn't do it. After seeing that I thought -- my impression of him was that he knew what he was doing because he had done this before and because the school asked him to do it -- I thought he must know what he was doing. After I saw that I felt like I could do it and I don't need so much advice.

The school seems to adhere to what we shall see is an unfortunate norm of providing no formal support for advisory. Lucy says there is no time.

> But, occasionally, we'll talk about, like someone will bring up, "Oh, I had a great advisory today. We talked about, What's the most important thing you learned in school?" I did that topic too, but it wasn't so good. Or somebody else would say, "Oh, yes, I had a good topic. . . ." So there's an exchange of ideas but it's never formal.

Even in the beginning of the school year there was no clarification provided for a new teacher.

> In the very beginning I asked, "What should we do?" They said, "Oh yes, we'll talk about it," or something, and nothing ever happened. One of the teachers has tea during Advisory. She has a sink in her classroom though, which makes a big difference. And she said "I like that, to set the mood."

> And the school [inaudible] setting a positive tone for the school. Because before Christmas it felt really negative and we kept trying to do things to make it positive and I think this is one of the things that they do, that they believe sets a positive tone and builds the community of the school as a safe place, as someplace where you can talk and let's you get to know the teachers. Because teachers tell stories also.

Elsewhere Lucy states explicitly that CSA's idea about advisory is that it is time that belongs to the students. There is also this secondary idea about it being time for students to get to know the teachers. To her surprise, Lucy learned soon after our talks that in the second term she would be assigned to a different advisory group. This shift was being made primarily to alleviate unbalance in teacher schedules but also to further this later goal, allowing students to get to know another teacher.

One element that has a positive impact on advisory at CSA is the fact that students are evaluated, for behavior and for participation in advisory. But there are other structural issues, besides teacher schedules, that have negative impact. Explaining the unbalance of girls and boys (seven and three, respectively) in her group, Lucy said

> there are more girls in our whole school and especially in this particular group. We divided it up evenly, girls and boys, so half of the boys are in my group and half are in the other group that meets at that time.

Perhaps this is less a structural issue than an issue of lack of attention or priority on advisory. The thinking that went into dividing the boys evenly did not consider the best interests of the boys. In fact, real thinking about the nature of advisory groups and the elements that would conspire towards their success or failure is notably absent in the configuration of groups. In the course of our talks, Lucy found appeal in the notion, in practice elsewhere, of a group staying together for more than one year. "But," she says, "I think the chemistry of my group . . . there are a couple of kids that would need to be . . .

it's not a good group for them." She goes on to say

> the advisory might work better if it were only 7th grade or only 6th grade because there is a huge difference. The 6th graders benefit from the stability of the 7th graders. I don't think the 7th graders benefit at all from the 6th graders. But I think also some of the 6th graders might speak up more if they weren't with the 7th graders, 'cause the emotional level.

In high school, as we will see, it can work well to have long term, mixed-age groups. But developmental levels are at an extreme of variance between sixth and eighth grade. The chasm between "young" sixth, or even seventh grade boys, and "mature" eighth grade girls is extreme. The territory of mutual concern that a group so comprised might realistically be able to discover is unlikely to be inhabited by the personal, or, realistically, by much of meaning to anyone in particular. From a practical standpoint, classes at CSA could easily have been split along age lines for advisory. As well, in switching leaders, the groups themselves could easily have been reconfigured. However, advisory is not given sufficient importance for a policy decision at the level of the adoption of mixed age groupings to be reconsidered for this context.

Overall, it would be easy to say that CSA follows the unsatisfactory norm in not providing formal support for advisory, but another reading is possible. Unbalance in the groupings notwithstanding, its simple but clear conception of advisory as time belonging to students may be enough to allow it to work, at least in the hands of a teacher as perceptive as Lucy.

Community College High School

It was a group of first and last resort where the kids could come and work together to get a sense of belonging and spirit about school and sort of reconstruct a family relationship and develop a kind of sharing where you could air personal problems and get input from other kids and the teacher on how to solve them.
Laura

Community College High School is a ten-year-old public alternative school which enrolls approximately 350 students largely of Hispanic and African-American stock from across the Bronx. The faculty, despite efforts to overcome this, is almost entirely white. The school occupies an old chemistry building on a community college campus in the West Bronx. The large classrooms contain archaic, immovable fixtures designed for demonstration teaching of science. The building is in less than excellent repair and students must notice that their school operates in leftover space.

The mission of CCHS is to serve students who have had trouble elsewhere in school. Central to attempts to work with this population, is Family Group. At CCHS these groups are constituted of 17 ninth through twelfth graders and a student stays in the same family group for their entire career in the school. Turnover results only from moving up and out, through graduation or attrition, and from new students entering.

I was told that Family Group meets daily from 9 to 10 AM, the first period of the day. But as at NPSS, the official schedule does not seem to reflect actual practice. Once I began visiting the school, it appeared that Family Group was, as a general rule, more or less happening Monday through Wednesday while on Thursday and Friday, Roundtables (akin to portfolio presentations) were often held, drawing both leaders and students away from the groups. On Fridays there was also intramural basketball, a popular activity among students, also involving some leaders.

The day at CCHS begins at 8:30 with a meeting of all, or most of the faculty. Announcements, which are printed and handed out, are gone over prelatory to the same function happening in Family Group. Attendance from

the day before is also reviewed -- the present operating solution to what has apparently been an intractable problem at the school, keeping track of who is actually present. It had been strongly suggested to me that my visits to the school should include attendance at these meetings. Besides the routine matters already mentioned, people reported on meetings they had attended, in or out of the school. For example, on the day of my first visit, in early February 1996, the previous day's multicultural assembly was discussed. (Adele complained that some teachers had either not been present or were not seated with their family groups, and that this was a problem because students "don't always respond to a teacher other than their family group teacher.") At that meeting I was introduced to the faculty and the purpose of my visits stated. For me, as time went on, these meetings served the useful function of allowing me to find a group to visit. Communication within the school was obviously enhanced by these gatherings. They also served as a model for one aspect of Family Group, attending to school news and issues.

I made seven visits to CCHS in February and March of 1996, attending seven family group sessions, two humanities classes, and one "Mysteries" ritual, as well as seven morning faculty meetings. I visited Nancy, Naomi and Adele's groups once, and Peter's group four times. These are high school groups with the exception of Naomi's, which is seventh and eighth grade. My visit to Adele's group was on the occasion of their first "Mysteries" ritual. In spite of my interest in this approach, I have not included this observation in what follows because the material is too far afield from the body of my study to be well considered here. The fact that I had no other exposure to that group of students also makes it difficult to confidently assess what was, or was not happening in the circle.

During the same period, I had two long interviews with Laurie, recently retired from teaching at CCHS. Laurie is the former leader of the group now led by Peter and was recommended to me as an excellent Family Group teacher. I also had opportunity to talk with Nancy, but not with Naomi, nor, except in passing, with Peter. The principle of the school, who I understand

to be a supporter of Family Group, was on sabbatical during this time, though if we had been able to arrange it, she would have met with me. Numerous people at the school were helpful and supportive of my study.

Toward the end of my visits to CCHS, on the phone one night arranging transportation, Nancy said

> I can tell you everything about Family Group. Now I know that in this place, this school, this student population, it is about being there, like in a family, and can't be judged on the basis of what it looks like is happening in the classroom on any given day.

Because this is true, it will be helpful to begin with an overview to facilitate appreciation of the field observations which follow. In spite of the fact that she is not introduced until later, and that some of what she says is, perhaps, specific to her experience, I have used a segment of text from my first interview with Laurie to introduce Family Group.

> It was a group of first and last resort where the kids could come and work together to get a sense of belonging and spirit about school and sort of reconstruct a family relationship and develop a kind of sharing where you could air personal problems and get input from other kids and the teacher on how to solve them.
>
> I walk in thinking all this was going to happen. We're going to sit down and do this, not realizing that the last thing they want to hear from me is "tell me your intimate secrets." And now my ideas about what Family Group is, . . . I don't know if I can say everything that it is, whatever a family is.
>
> But it's also your Family Group at school, so school issues would be discussed and debated. We had a school Senate, we had a school Fairness Committee which was like a discipline committee and the Senate and Fairness groups would issue a weekly report and those reports would be read each week in family group and then it would be discussed. Some people would feel that such and such a policy or

such and such a determination was unfair or wrong or right or something and we would discuss that, and then our representative was supposed to take that back to the next meeting of Fairness or Senate or Policy Council. So, there were these interlocking circles of school functioning that got discussed in Family Group.

If a particular problem was happening, like if the graffiti problem cropped up again, which it did in kind of a cyclical way, we'd have discussions about graffiti and what we could do about it. There were always those few who felt that "It's a free country -- so what's wrong with graffiti?" And what's right with graffiti? And where is it right and when it is right and there's a school policy, "No graffiti on our walls." There are topics that come up over and over again.

You might want to do a unit on human sexuality, kind of periodically so you wouldn't keep saying the same things over and over again to the same kids, I had to kind of cycle it around differently, but to get them talking about that. And a lot of AIDS education and I used to try to do current events. Periodically I'd bring in a piece of "60 Minutes" that I had taped, or whatever I thought would interest them, and stuff from the newspaper.

Sometimes we would do what they call "sustained silent reading." The Family Group might pick a book and one day a week, say Thursday or (each teacher would organize it differently) maybe three days a week for 20 minutes each of those days they'd read the book, or sometimes they would read the book aloud, taking turns reading, and if it was a current events article or something, there'd be discussion afterwards on what the kids thought about it. There was no set curriculum.

Sometimes it was whatever came up. I had occasional members in my Family Group who would come in periodically with -- I have something I want to talk to the group about. This happened with my boyfriend . . . , or, this happened with my mother . . . . And that was

fabulous. We would be able to really take advantage of each other in that way.

Very often there wasn't anything like that and we played games. I had a little storehouse of games. I thought that was wonderful, because they learned to interact with each other, there were rules, we had to be fair, we had to give people second chances, a kind of good sportsmanship feeling. And the kids I was teaching generally did not know [the games] and I found that to be sort of a cultural gap that had to be filled. These wonderful pastimes. So that they learn that when you are in a group of people there are a variety of activities that can take place and they can be anything from games to political discussions, to sexual discussions, to family problems to community problems.

Every Thursday was make-up day so you could use that Family Group time for making up homework and the teachers were available for tutoring, so I would inevitably end up tutoring a couple of students in math since that that was my specialty. They didn't like make-up day and there were a few kids who really took advantage.

This introduction shows the broad spectrum of activity that takes place in the Family group time frame. We see that the remedial academic functions (reading and make-up) occupy delineated, predictable slots. We also see regular space for school issues and problems, and we are told that the groups really do function as families. With this in mind, let us have a look inside some classrooms.

Nancy's Family Group
Community College High School

If you are an adult and you have it together and you are steady and you are there for them then sooner or later they will open up to you.
Nancy

The first Family Group I was welcome to visit was Nancy's. This group met in a small seminar room with a large table. A woman in her late 40's, Nancy is tall, big boned and pale, with a mane of dark curly hair. She has a vague, spacey air. Nancy taught English at the college for a number of years, and, looking for a change, found one at CCHS. Later she told me of her radical political/environmental leanings, and that she is engaged not only in writing a novel, but also in obtaining a Ph.D. in political economics.

At 9 AM this particular morning not much was happening in Nancy's room. I had ample time to examine the walls. Posted prominently was a hand lettered piece of construction paper which read as follows:

Community College High School Domains

1. Communicating, crafting, reflecting
2. Knowing and Respecting myself and others
3. Connecting the past, present and future
4. Thinking critically and Questioning
5. Valuing and Ethical decision making
6. Taking responsibility for myself and my community
7. Working together and resolving conflicts.

Heavy use of the gerundive; perhaps evidence of "group think." What, I wondered, is "valuing"? My notes, unattributed, read:

Family Group → Team Leader

Directions inquiry focused on:

How we help others feel successful.

helping to clarify goals

recognize accomplishments

pointing out evidence of success

helping others become re-educated

Is Big Brother here? I wondered. Then, according to my notes:

Students filter in and a discussion, initiated by Nancy, begins. The first topic, relevant to one or two of the five students present, concerns bringing family members (blood family) to Roundtable. Then a discussion of punctuality. Henry comes in at 9:15, kisses a girl and greets Lamb, a public, friendly, disruptive entrance; an arrival. Reporting and discussion ensues about Policy Council, Senate and Fairness, three committees on which each Family Group has representatives. Nancy wants to know, "How was the multicultural event?" The group discusses how it could be improved.

Then a long discussion about how to spend the $125 allocated to Family Group: buy an air conditioner for the room, or other improvement? take a trip? They decide to go to Hackers, Hitters and Hoops, an indoor recreation center in Manhattan which features miniature golf, basketball and an arcade. Nancy wonders how this can be justified as an educational outing, but they went there last year and it was fun, so there doesn't seem to be any real reason why they can't go.

Kids drift in and range themselves around the room. In the center is a table, and the first few are seated there, others sit on the side, some on higher stools or tables. There is an intimate group feeling which even includes those who purposefully keep themselves on the edge of the circle. I come away impressed at the relaxed feeling in the room. The students, who seem to hold the power -- to disrupt or refuse to participate, tolerate the teacher, perhaps as an adolescent tolerates a loving, if irksome parent. There is a feeling of working together. Nancy endeavors to get them to focus on the various matters which need attending to, but she refuses to take any lead in making the decisions.

At some point during the session, perhaps apropos the matter of lateness, Nancy announces, "We do have some people who don't feel comfortable in

this room -- so that's why they're not here." Later I inquire about this. She tells me there is a powerful pecking order among the girls, "The new girls who come in have a really hard time unless they are totally meek." So they spend family time in the cafeteria.

Nancy offers me rides to the school (I had a broken foot). She is happy to be interviewed in the car, which I do on my next visit. Immediately afterwards I record what I can remember.

> I don't dream about them any more. I couldn't sleep at first due to the things that went on in Family Group. It really is a family group.
>
> We have no training for this. But at least we [teachers] can talk to each other -- but at first you don't because you think something is wrong with you.
>
> After awhile I learned how far I could go with [each of] them. It is all in the individual relationships. Each of these kids has a story/situation at home. Several are kicked out -- because of the parents. I am definitely a mother figure to them. Their parents are not there for them.
>
> When I came (4 years ago) -- I have only been a high school teacher for 4 years, I was an adjunct at the college before that -- I was given a family group, came into it and it was really tough. There were three kids in there who were truly disturbed. One of them is dead now. The rest of them have left. Four of them are still in the group. We have a high dropout rate.
>
> Now I have a terrific group. They take care of me. If I am having a bad day, not feeling well, they are nice to me.

This is also when Nancy said "If you are an adult and you have it together and you are steady and you are there for them then sooner or later they will open up to you." Some of Nancy's experience is similar to what we hear from Laurie. Only as a more recent teacher, instead of talking about training the she received, she says "we have no training for this." Note her conviction

that it is all in the individual relationships. Later we will compare what we hear here from Nancy with the views and situation of other group leaders.

Naomi's Class and Family Group
Community College High School

What I had observed in Nancy's group was different than what would transpire with middle school students. Musing aloud about this to Nancy, I was informed that this school, despite its name, includes 7th and 8th grade, and that surely Naomi would be happy to have me observe her Family Group. As class time was now beginning, Naomi, a middle-aged black woman with a British accent, strongly encouraged me to stay for the class, to speak with the students, and to come back the next day for Family Group. And so I did.

What I found in her social studies curriculum included elements that I might hope to find in advisory, elements related to role, to family and to place. Students were completing work from the previous term, and one who was finished showed me his folder. The most elaborate assignment was as follows:

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Progressing:

- story of my name
- interview with parent, history of first or last name
- create a collage that represents your name

Mastery

- research 1st name of non-family member
- research street where you live or some other that you pass regularly
- research how our school got its name

Distinction

- create a name for our middle school; include a story
- give your name to the street, neighborhood where you live, and write a story on the history of the name

Another project was entitled PLACE IN THE FAMILY and included

- what is your role in your family?
- what is the role of everyone else in your family?
- what a family member thinks your role is
- family time line showing dates of special events

A third project required students to map their apartments, their neighborhood, and their route from home to school.

The next day I found Naomi after the morning faculty meeting and accompanied her to her classroom. My notes read:

> At 9:10 six students, one at table writing, some playing basketball, some in the hall. Naomi goes off to seek her assistant. Now there are five students, three work with the student teacher at the board on spelling. One pulls apart licorice string in a big motion and leaves, another wearing two caps wanders in and out.
>
> Student Teacher: "Who ate breakfast today except candy?" Then, to an arriving student, "Good morning, how you doing?"
>
> Naomi: "Every day I have to go looking for people."
>
> Attendance: 9 present, out of 17.
>
> The meeting begins. The desks, the same flat-topped type as at NPS6, are already arranged in a large, loose circle. Naomi introduces me and has everyone tell me their name, repeating the name of the previous person. Then I am to try to repeat all their names. By the time this is finished the size of the group has increased significantly. Two boys who are considerably larger than the rest sit in the back corners, apart. Naomi invites her students to ask me questions. They want to know how I broke my foot.
>
> I tell them I broke it in the subway. They say I should sue. I say it wasn't the subway's fault. They say I should sue anyway, I might get some money. Naomi then asks "What does it mean to you to be honest?" There is a go-around, one person after another, moving

around the circle to her right, responds to this, or passes. The question becomes, "Would you lie?" My notes include:

"for my friend not to be in trouble"
"would not be honest for some money"
"if I'm scared to get hit -- I lie."
"if it's an ugly baby"

Girls dominate the forum. There is some back and forth, responding to what people say, then moving to the next person. Naomi's next question is, "Does honesty play a part in building trust in your family?" The discussion turns to taking the blame for someone else, and lying to protect your friend -- and yourself -- because "they" know you're the only one who knows. The teacher seems to think you should tell. The students are concerned that "they will beat you down." All but one student has participated.

The teacher asks, "Do you think we can learn to be honest?" and later says, "You have to care about something to be honest." At this Zam, one of the older, big boys, asks Naomi: "If your best friend were on trial for murder and you were the only witness and he did it -- what would you do?" Naomi responds by saying that she has told her sons, "If you go out there and get yourself in trouble I'm not going to help you out."

It was an engaging session, proof, perhaps of the value of a live issue, even one arising from a stimulus as remote as the condition of a guest's foot. Both Naomi and the student teacher took pains to inform me that this had been an exceptional session.

Although attention was engaged around the circle as they listened to each other's views, I am provoked to think that Naomi's conventional moral stance is less than optimal. Without criticizing anyone's statements directly, she clearly communicates that there is a right with a capital "R." Students holding prudent street values might suffer a diminishment of self worth for holding views which differ from hers. And on a purely cognitive level, a rich

opportunity to validate multiple perspectives has been lost.

Naomi is not anxious to be interviewed, there is no time. Nor will she allow me to come casually to visit her Family Group. She wants advance warning. I think she only wants me there when she has planned in advance and knows something particular will happen, and that this is rare. In any case I am unable to observe in her classroom again.

Peter's Class and Family Group
Community College High School

One day neither Nancy nor Adele nor Naomi's Family Groups are available, and I am led to Peter. Peter is a friendly, heavyset young man. He has straight auburn hair drawn back into a short ponytail, and a minimal beard. On the wall of his room is a sheet headed:

Our Dreams
To be rich
Money to go out
great job for the summer
have parents forever
move to California
to be all I can be
Famous
Doctor
lawyer
cop
big in the music industry
support my family
successful
to love life
healthy
happy family
good job.

In this class, like in Naomi's, I find that the humanities curriculum covers affective material. A short curriculum on dreams is in progress and today's lesson, which follows Family Group, includes a film of people's recollections of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech. Socratic dialogue is used.

My notes are as follows:

> Students filter in slowly. When there is enough of a quorum, the meeting begins. On Mondays they begin with a weekend check-in. Today there is a discussion about their room. Perhaps they will paint it, or get a pet. When trips are discussed, there is a real spark of interest at the mention of the possibility of having a barbecue in Peter's backyard, as they had done last year, disappointment when it seems they might not thereby get to meet his girlfriend. (She might be at work.)

Like Nancy, Peter keeps the conversation on track and tries to bring topics to resolution. He occasionally suggests possibilities to open up the parameters of the discussion, expanding the range of pet options under consideration, for example, and he provides a reality check now and again, but is careful not to influence the direction of decisions. He seems, here as well as later in class, to have infinite patience and gentle humor. I am impressed with what I note as "Buddha nature" -- a deep non-reactiveness. During class there is much to provoke.

My notes on the several sessions of Peter's Family Group which I observed are scanty because when the group was in session it felt intrusive to take them. And afterwards it was not immediately apparent that anything in particular had happened. Not that it ever felt like it did at NPSI when advisory "wasn't happening." Months later, with the perspective of hindsight, I recorded what stayed in my memory. Occurrences at one session are not distinguished from the next, except for one Monday when Peter was not present and the session was run by the senior student member, the Shogun, as he identified himself. This young man is the one student remaining in the group from Laurie's tenure. Peter spent that hour meeting with the parent of a boy who had raged out of control some days earlier.

> As students straggled in and took a place at the large, roundish table each one's presence was not just acknowledged, but welcomed. One older female student who had missed some school sat outside

the circle and Peter coaxed her to join, but failed. Soon he went to where she sat, crouched by her to hear the story of what had recently transpired in her life. On a visceral level this was like a calming and soothing stability applied to a wired, wild and frightened creature.

Another morning, the one when Peter is not present, this same girl related, after coaxing from the Shogun, backed up by the silent, patient attention of the group, that over the weekend her boyfriend had been busted and everyone in the apartment at the time except her had been arrested. She seemed shattered. Also dismayed to be in a place in which she apparently had been before. In both instances one could sense that much as she held herself apart, this girl needed this group. That this was one solid ground where people would hear her, and not judge, where she was cared about and might find help.

Some students were quiet, not lending their voice to the proceedings, but there was a sense of everyone's presence being an acknowledged part of the whole. There was humor, gentle teasing, for example of a girl dressed to the nines who recounted having spent the weekend shopping for something to wear on a date; discussion of the price of another one's new sneakers, lost to be unreasonably high.

The point here is that much may be going on in Family Group on any quiet day. An interesting game or activity is not necessary. Most important is the presence of the group members to each other.

No one connected with CCHS mentioned the work of D. W. Winnicott, the British child psychoanalyst, though family group as constituted at CCHS could have been created to fill his prescription. Speaking in 1968 to the British Student Health Association, Winnicott said

> In the time of adolescent growth, boys and girls awkwardly and erratically emerge out of childhood and away from dependence, and grope toward adult status. Growth is not just a matter of inherited tendency; it is also a matter of a highly complex interweaving with the facilitating environment. If the family is still there to be used, it is used in a big way.

and if the family is no longer there to be used, or to be set aside (negative one), then small social units need to be provided to contain the adolescent growth process.

As we read Laurie's words in the next section we begin to see what goes into creating such small social units, units which enable the kind of presence visible in "Family" at CS 38.

Laurie
Community College High School

I didn't want to believe that this was life in America. The external hardness that a lot of kids developed to compensate -- street lore. So I tried to establish the atmosphere in Family Group where this could be talked about -- feelings -- if they were scared for example. I couldn't believe what was going on so I needed them to tell me. "No, Laurie, you don't understand." They were eager to educate me, to tell me their story. They let me in on their secret language and I respected it. Letting them tell me the stories, what goes on on their streets, acknowledging them as real. I think a lot of what goes on in school is not real.

Laurie

Laurie was referred to me as an outstanding family group teacher. Now in her early 40's, Laurie is retired from teaching and has re-direction to become a psychotherapist. When the folks at CCHS first told me about her, it was because she had written a paper on Family Group which they thought I might like to read. But there is another, more essential background note.

Laurie told me she came to CCHS because her "condition had deteriorated" so that she couldn't climb stairs. She had sought an "accessible" alternative school. Laurie has Multiple Sclerosis. Now she is totally paralyzed, unable to move any part of her body. To speak, she employs a microphone to amplify her weak voice. I can describe this condition in a sentence or two and you can keep on reading. Without a pause to begin to get your imagination around the enormity of this condition, you cannot possibly assimilate in the passing of a sentence the physical reality in which Laurie lives. One closest word for people so afflicted is quadriplegic, but what is that to the able-bodied? In point of fact, her paralysis extends beyond her limbs. A woman in the prime of life, she cannot turn her head. Extending ourselves, we can only begin to imagine that with which she has learned to live and more, the capacity of heart that has enabled her to meet this fate with grace and sweetness. Patently, such a condition must impact one's consciousness. As I did not know her before, I cannot estimate the extent to which Laurie's being has been affected. But clearly her work in Family Group at CCHS was conditioned not only by the actual fact of her disability, but by the person Laurie is. I begin the presence I encountered comes through in her voice as

transcribed below, the voice of a radiant and thoughtful human being.

In the first of my two lengthy interviews with her, the context is one of my asking questions in relation to the paper she had written on the subject of Family Group for a psychotherapeutic education program. This first interview, which comprises much of the material in this section of my study, was taped. During the second interview I took copious notes, reasonably complete because Laurie spoke slowly. This forced slowness probably enhances the thoughtful and deliberate quality of her speech.

The taped transcript begins with Laurie asking me to tell her about my project. After I describe my focus of concern and interest she asks further questions to ascertain whether and where I've had a chance to observe Family Group at CCHR. At first glance this is sufficiently mundane to pass unremarked. Several teachers with whom I spoke quite naturally questioned "where I was coming from" as we began an interview, though this inquiry from Laurie was the most explicit. Her approach with me, which might be characterized as a kind of active receptivity, or as an intuitive process of attunement, allowed the content of our interview to go farthest in engaging matters of importance to each of us. Laurie's apparently natural engagement with the other is clearly an invaluable quality in an advisory leader.

As she began to answer to my query about how she had developed her skill as a Family Group teacher, Laurie provided more evidence of this powerful receptivity. For example, when, after starting with difficult groups, she began to develop her first "pretty nice" family group, she says, "that was a real experience and I learned a lot from what it was like to be with them." Later, at CCHR she "got started with people who sometimes were as nice as it that I didn't learn a lot from them, but almost always they had at least one or two ways about them that I could learn something new from." This articulated eagerness to learn, even from the rare teachers who she is ostensibly teaching, is another aspect of her openness conducive to success at this work.

Laurie taught for 22 years, first in traditional junior high and high school and then for ten years in alternative schools. Her first three years in alternative school was in a GED program

> and they had Family Group but in that setting they changed Family Group every . . . I don't remember, . . . every semester or every year.
>
> I really learned the hard way. I had a very difficult group the first time around and I was petrified. I was also thrown in without any training. And I was given a description of what Family Group was supposed to be and began to run that group as if it was that already without understanding that you have to *train* the group and *develop* that feeling among the students, if indeed it can be developed among that particular group. Or else you do the best you can. Nobody trained me how, and nobody trained me that you have to train them, that the whole thing isn't just a naturally bought into concept of the program. But gradually the students in my family group changed every semester and gradually I managed to get a group together that was a pretty nice family group and that was a real experience and I learned a lot from what it was like to be with them. And in the alternative schools a lot of training was available. So over those three years I also got training in how to run a family group and began to understand a little bit better the concept of how to build a group and how to create cohesiveness in the group.

Laurie identifies the process in which she began to be trained, the process of creating a cohesive group, as a key ingredient of a successful advisory group. A bonded group forms the basic container, the ground for whatever may later come, or be brought to the situation. Laurie is more articulate and emphatic about this than the other teachers with whom I spoke, but at CCHS it was evident in each of the families I visited that a sense of group had been established. Each group was as different from the others as one individual from the next; the bond, or coherence was felt differently in each room but was for its diversity no less potent a presence in the atmosphere.

Describing the training, Laurie said

> people would come in from the outside and give us pointers. That was where I learned, for example, that a large amount of the work that you do for Family Group takes place outside the Family Group. I didn't understand that so well until I was in a workshop where they explained that you called the parents, you deal with the kid in the hallway, you have a private talk with them, you call them to your office. You don't talk to them *in* Family Group about some of the stuff that's going on. Like a kid with a lateness problem. Stuff that happens of an interpersonal nature. If the person has been disrespectful to you, or to another student or if there's been an altercation between a couple of students you might want to deal with that, you almost certainly want to deal with that by either speaking to them each separately and then getting them together or doing some kind of a conflict resolution technique.
>
> We learned about that too, we got trainings in conflict resolution. But just the idea of not only talking to a kid about something, but then I learned also to take special notice of kids in a very quiet way, not necessarily as part of the Family Group, but you stop them in the hall and you might say, "I just heard from Cora what a great project you did." Or, "I've been thinking all day about that shirt. When you get tired of it, will you give it to me?" I used to say that all the time. They dressed so much better than I did. Or anything at all. "You made a great contribution in Family Group this morning, I'm still thinking about what you said." A lot of little inputs that keep them aware that you care about them and you think about what they say and do and you notice them in a special way, and you take the trouble to communicate that. And that you call the homes when they're not there and find out what's wrong.

Laurie served as advisor to the students in her family group, and individual contacts like those mentioned here would further her work as

advisor. It is interesting and important to note, however, that this information she gives us about work outside family group is *for* family group, a report on trainings given to teachers for building a group and helping it to cohere, trainings Laurie deemed particularly valuable to this end.

When Laurie came to CCHS, she discovered a structural factor which served an important function in supporting this key process of group creation.

> Once again, the first family group I got was a horror story and for all the three years of experience, whatever I had learned felt like it had gone out the window. It was an enormous struggle. Of course, I had more skills than I had before but it was a difficult group of kids. But the difference was in CCHS that the kids stay in that family group from the time they get to the school until the time they graduate. Which was such a wonderful concept to me. So that you have a chance to develop a family ethos, a family tradition, a family this, a family that, and the kids get to know each other over a long period of time. You go through a lot together. You get really used to each other, you have a lot of time to learn about each other. So even though it was enormously difficult and I would sometimes leave family group crying, I was so unhappy, gradually, once again, because of kids who either dropped out or got transferred or graduated and other kids who joined the group, the group got gentler and gentler. And it seemed to me that I became very skilled as the students got better and better and I don't know which is the chicken or which is the egg.

Laurie packs in several important factors here. Given a structural situation which allows for a lot of time: five hours a week over a period of four or more years, many things begin to happen. The group develops a distinct identity and character. The level of bonding is deepened. Group bonding occurs not only because of familiarity developed over time, but also because

of the accumulation of shared experience, shared participation in moments of particular power, or even pain. Later Laurie spoke specifically of the sharing of "deep personal stuff," saying that such moments permanently affect the tone of the group. Laurie characterizes such moments as spiritual. It seems likely that the quality which characterizes these instances is the fullness of presence on the part of both the speaker and the listeners.

Looking for other explanations for her success, she says,

> It's really hard for me to deconstruct what happened. I think I did develop some special skills over time. I also became very experienced, and I really do believe that being disabled had a lot to do with it. The students were protective of me and they became very important. If I dropped a piece of paper, the only way it could be picked up was if somebody else picked it up. Anything that had to be done in the room, they had to do it. I wasn't making a circle out of the chairs after awhile and I really believe this taught me a lesson that a lot of teachers, including myself, have to learn and I might never have learned it if I hadn't become disabled. You can empower the kids so much by giving over the whole running of the factory, or what you want to call it, the institution.

Nancy, who is not disabled, had also mentioned that her students took care of her. But in Laurie's scenario of a dropped piece of paper, it is possible to visualize the crossing of the line between a hostile group and a group which acknowledges a commonality of purpose. Laurie's disability makes her vulnerable and requires her to trust others. An atmosphere of trust is an atmosphere which allows feelings. To show feelings makes one vulnerable, and such vulnerability is often a precondition of growth. It seems to me that these may be the intermediate steps between what Laurie says here about responsibility and empowerment and what she speaks about later in terms of love.

In any case, in her paper Laurie had noted that insofar as Family Group parallels an actual family structure, behaviors that arise can reflect the home

situation. I wondered about that, and the extent to which it might be like transference in a therapeutic situation.

> In the therapeutic situation the same type of thing will happen. Wherever you are, you will behave like you are. As a therapist I get a chance to do more intimate questioning of you and ask you to tell me more about certain things when I observe certain behaviors. With the kids it's a little more subtle because you have to be more careful about their privacy and only go as far as you think you can go. That's true in therapy too but by coming to therapy, you give me more permission to do that than by just being in my family group.
>
> But if you see a kid, say, being very disrespectful towards other kids, there are certain assumptions that you might try out. You can't make them. I mean you can make them at your own risk. You might want to try out the assumption that this is the way the child is spoken to at home, or this is the way the child interacts with his or her siblings or something, some reflection of what's going on in the home and it gives you a clue. And especially in interaction, 'cause they're interacting with others.

Notice that respect again surfaces as a prime example of an issue which demands attention. It comes up in each of my conversations, not disrespect for teachers so much as for peers. Laurie's therapeutic perspective and training allow her to consider specific causes of such behavior patterns in specific kids. This opens up a different range of approaches than might otherwise be considered. But Laurie's therapeutic predilection cannot, perhaps, reasonably be held as a standard against which to measure teachers. This is a matter I will consider later at greater length.

As she continues, Laurie provides further evidence of her receptivity, and of the way in which this quality is invaluable for capturing the "teachable moment" in advisory. And she also begins to give a picture of one aspect of her notion of modeling.

You never know what's going to happen next. It's very interesting the open attitude that you have to maintain in family in order to stay sane because anything can come up at any given moment. One student may say something that offends another student very deeply and depending on that student's style, that student might withdraw or that student might jump on the first kid. I don't mean necessarily physically jump on them, but really start an unstoppable stream of angry invective. And I tend to think that there is something that reflects some belief that this child has picked up in the family, or behavior, or maybe this person is picked on for this thing.

I think you have to be very careful about what you assume is going on but just as in therapy, it's not so much that one can go back and fix what happened in the past but that a new model of relationship can take place so that every time blah blah blah happens in this person's family maybe X happens and therefore Y happens whereas now X happens and therefore A, B, C, D or E might happen and Wow what a revelation! – that things can be handled so differently. Maybe the person will actually be listened, to or feel heard for the first time in a long time, or be noticed or be appreciated or be this or be that. So there's a wonderful opportunity to show options of different reactions, maybe more respectful reactions to whatever the kid does.

This modeling benefits the entire group, all who are present. Sometimes the responses of the advisor provide the new model, sometimes the group itself is involved. Laurie also spoke about modeling in a less personal mode. She gave an example of the kind of ground work which helps a crisis transform into a model.

When you have a real difference of opinion between kids you might have a real opportunity to talk about difference of opinion. As a family group how do you want to handle difference of opinion? And this is what I learned, I think, the whole way of stopping the panic

about 'Oh my God, is this going to turn into a fight, what am I going to do?' How do I pacify this one? How do I calm that one down? How do I stop this without . . . ? And instead, to take a step back and try to look at the larger picture and say, 'All right we have a real strong difference of opinion here.'

Of course this assumes I can get a word in edgewise. That is not always the case. It might be the case the next day. I try to get to the bottom of it, or ask the family group how they want to handle differences of opinion. Hopefully early on in the family group this has already been discussed -- that people may have strongly different beliefs and we want to respect each other's beliefs even if we don't agree with them and once said, it's so easily said but not so easily done, but at least we can refer back. And it may actually be posted on the wall somewhere because those types of family agreements are good to have posted on the wall as reminders and we can look up and say, We know -- it's not easy to do, it's not easy at home, it's not easy on the job, it's not easy this minute but maybe we can find a way.

And that's, I think, maybe one of the most valuable lessons I learned about being a Family Group teacher, is to take that step back. To build a foundation, and then to be able to take a step back when things go awry and be calm, not panic, and try to make something useful out of it.

Other modeling is provided by the group itself. Here is an example Laurie gave of something that happened in her Family. Among other things, we see that Laurie's students have internalized her approach to one particular problem.

Josie was always late. We were glad if she made it at all. One day she came on time and everyone -- spontaneously -- stood and applauded. It was recognized as a wonderful accomplishment. It might be the only time but it was recognized. If you haven't developed that kind of a culture in the group it might not even be noticed.

Obviously this lovely episode is evidence of an impressive groundwork of group creation, as emphasized by Laurie herself in its recounting. But she also provides evidence another potent ingredient. When Laurie says, "We were glad if she made it at all," we see an extraordinary absence of censure. At another point she shows that this attitude is an integral aspect of her approach:

> One way – the solution to everything is more love. To me this is a very spiritual place. ... Student is not coming to school. Calling, not censoring, that's spiritual. Modeling compassion was a big part. I didn't think the students had too many models of compassion. Some were very compassionate but those who weren't were lacking models. That was one of the most important things you could do – modeling what they didn't have.
>
> It's important to expose people to this frame of mind. Teachers tend to develop loving feelings toward the Family Group – and express that in their own way. What ever you do for them, give to them is a modeling. One year I was teamed with a teacher who would cook for them. She served them. She was a very generous hostess. The kids were thrilled. In the evaluation that was their favorite thing. It was her way of being openhearted. That's a spiritual thing.

Risking repetitiveness, I suggest that consideration is due to the implicit atmosphere in which this modeling can take place – or which it creates.

In her paper, Laurie had said "One of your most frequent questions will be: 'What are you feeling right now?' Often the student will not know what he is feeling." When I asked about this, the conversation took an unexpected turn:

> Yes, it's good to get them in touch. And I've learned also since, and now I've been in my training program for an additional year and I see that, well, I knew this before actually, it's just I'm in touch with it in a deeper way now. It's good to have a ritual by which you start off. It doesn't have to be the same thing every day but I think it is good if it's

some kind of go-around, whether it's a funny one or a serious one. 'How do you feel right now?' can be an any kind of one because some people could feel jokey, and some people could feel sad and some people could pass, but something that gets you to be here now, to make a space between whatever your concerns were of a moment ago and here we are now in family group all together. I don't think that'll mean that you stop being angry at your mother, I mean if you say, 'How do you feel right now?' and the person says 'I'm feeling very angry, I had a fight with my mother,' that's fine, but I'm feeling very angry in family group right now. So at least they're here and relating to the people who are here and telling the people who are here how they feel. So I like that ritual.

This is the best example I found of an opening circle routine as a potent tool for creating the space and presence necessary to the function of advisory. But as good as this sounds, I wondered how it could work in the situation I had observed at CCHS in which students regularly arrive late, coming in in a gradual way. Laurie said the school had experimented with having Family Group at 11:00 but there was a problem with the eating/reporting procedure and

> a lot of teachers felt that they wanted to have the kids the first thing in the morning, they wanted to start the day with them and get them ready to go to school and to see them in the morning.

Laurie says lateness is

> just a constant problem and it's more prevalent in the 'at risk' population than elsewhere so you are dealing not only with frequent and habitual lateness but deep lateness like 10, 20, 40 minutes lateness into the period, missing family group altogether.

She says some problems just never go away.

When we spoke about institutional factors, Laurie said she thought it essential to have the head of the school make an issue of advisory.

to bring in the trainers, to have one staff meeting every few months where each teacher brings one of their favorite Family Group lessons and shares them with the group, or maybe three people lead mini-lessons so that you get to experience what it's like and so that you are constantly training each other. I really think that's key, that it has to be built in to staff time together, the outside trainers and the on-going mutual training and refining of this kind of activity.

But if this is not continued because you have new staff and even old staff, you know, you fall out of things after a while, it has to be ongoing. Sometimes you get a few freebies, but trainers have to be paid and you have to be willing to make that commitment.

This institutional commitment about which Laurie speaks is inseparable from developing a culture of group creation. Laurie has demonstrated that group formation is the basic groundwork of successful advisory. Since this kind of experience, much like training, is rarely part of a teacher's experience, staff development is a fundamental requirement for a successful program. Modeling what students do not have is the other primary ingredient identified by Laurie as essential to advisory. Modeling, as she describes it, is partly a group process but most importantly it appears to be dependent on the personal qualities of the leader, for she can only truly model what is integral to her being.

There was a unique component to my interviews with Laurie, a thread of focus and articulation of the spiritual dimension of advisory. I included examples of her practice of love as "the solution to everything" with the discussion of modeling. Other elements of this spiritual are considered elsewhere in this paper, but attention to one other aspect belongs here. Laurie says:

> I believe the whole person, an integral part of person's wholeness is the individual's spiritual side. Everybody has this component. It's a natural endowment or it's built in - hard wired. It's not like you can be without it and be whole.

With this as a given, as yet another piece of background, I want to draw attention to what I see as Laurie's recognition of specific aspects of her students spiritual life, or potential. She says:

> I think they want to make a difference. Maybe they can't lead their whole street or neighborhood but in some small ways. They want to be somebody, be good at something. They want to have the power to make a difference.
>
> They want to be cared about. And it's care about you that makes you real. And if you're real you have the power to have an impact on somebody else. If I can care about you you're built an impact on me. So you know you could have an impact on somebody else. It's only a beginning. To feel that you at least exist, cause

Telling me this, as ever, Laurie includes a concrete suggestion: "Talk to Family Group about one time when you really made a difference. And then you remember more." But her really love of activities is secondary to the extraordinary convergence expressed in the last quoted paragraphs. Laurie traverses a circle from the transmission of her own personal caring for a student to the empowerment this caring can effect, enabling the young person to begin to believe that he or she can choose to make a positive impact of their own. What Laurie describes here is a process of spiritual transformation through, in her terms, the infusion of love.

Laurie's presence, her being, like other teachers I observed at CCHS, most notably Peter, provide superb models. But it is their actual caring, appropriately and steadily communicated, that enables change. The effectiveness of these teachers results not only from their rich sense of humanity, but from their deep sea of theological

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

there is the relationship to different teachers. We talk about how we expect them to behave and academically what we expect. How the school operates, expectations, how to decide up your day – homework.

This seems a reasonable beginning. It was the beginning of a lesson belonging to students. Curiously, there is no evidence of group formation activities, and even of activities designed for students to get to know each other. The basic activities were dominated by each of any other subjects.

At a rapid pace Larry went on, telling me in quick succession that other schools call it different things – family group, family time, but whatever – that's a big part of advisory. There are books on this. What you can do. After that it is up to the teacher what to do. Registered by Dec to do are and health ed, and ASW. There's literature. Now to talk to your kid about sexuality. That's a big part.

One interesting aspect of this passage is the contrast between the place of sex education in the head of Larry's list, and the treatment it gets. Larry mentions self esteem frequently throughout the interview as an important aspect of advisory without saying anything more specific about it than that there are books on what you can do. Sex ed is sentenced and so is a host of other things such of which gets more play. And there is no indication that Larry sees these materials, and even that he has examined and rejected them. Larry to continues:

every videos about past previous situations. They stop before anything happens. Tons of videos about that. Substance abuse, alcohol, videos's sex is pregnancy.

This is also not balanced it's theoretical lists using, and he again he gives no indication that he does or don't use it.

With a bit more elaboration Larry next mentions another necessary conflict resolution / communication. They

work you through a whole series of steps. There are different ones, they are good. All begin from the premise that conflict is not an

he began to include doings from his own advisory on his list.

> Trips to show them New York. One year we went to St. John the Divine, a temple and a mosque. Museums, ICP is good, Museum of the City of NY.

He also says he

> tried doing current events with the kids but it didn't work. Monumentally uninterested in Bosnia. But I tried for awhile.

Here, a tone of discouragement creeps into Larry's normally upbeat beat. I had often observed him trying to convey his passionate concern about one or another geopolitical issue. His students usually did not know where places were, much less care. A famous class blooper was a student's confusion of Amsterdam with the local avenue by that name.

Next came a mention of academic counseling, something in a similar mode to the school acclimatization activities with which he had begun. Larry also listed journals in advisory though when I asked if they really do this he said "it's one of those things that gets started but tends not to be continued." His use of the passive voice here seems to indicate lack of ownership, or lack of awareness that his own conviction is essential to the success of such a process. As he lists advisory activities, a few items slip in which are elements of the academic program, coloring maps for example. This suggests that advisory does not occupy a clearly identified niche in Larry's mind.

By contrast, I remember him enthusiastically

> reading the school newspaper and discussing issues in the school, problems like somebody steals something, gets suspended, dies.

But saying this, he immediately follows up with "It becomes this little group where you can talk about things." Clearly, "little groups" are not his thing. "In general," he says, "it's supposed to be about moral and ethical issues" but this is a "should" statement and, like much of the above is not borne out by evidence of how such material is, or could be approached, unless, as we see below, the new intention to develop intellectual comprehension of current social issues is understood to cover this territory.

Becoming more straightforward still, Larry goes on to say that when Division I advisory meets,

> eleven to twelve becomes free time. Big problem for the school. Kids roaming the halls. Free time for kids and teachers.

This candid description conveys what I had observed, part of what prompted my study. Later he adds "the kids see it as not serious -- why? -- no grade. It's partly our fault."

But, says Larry

> In September we're changing things a little. It's too much to ask for all the portfolios in 11th and 12th grade. So we're restructuring the portfolio process. Physical issues, social issues and ethics portfolios will be done in advisory. Kids will now have to do a certain amount of work. We'll expose them to a lot of different issues: abortion, labeling of lyrics, gender bias in sports at NPHS, homophobia -- that's a big problem. If it's not the issue they choose they will write a summary. For the issue they choose they'll make a video or write an essay.

Here is a major change in school policy on advisory coming out of the work of a committee on portfolios. Portfolios are an area in which NPHS has been a pioneer, and in which the school would like to retain its leadership position. I remember from the previous year that the work of the portfolio committee was highly valued. By contrast, Larry refers to advisory as a stepchild. This is in spite of the fact that it has been in place from the beginning at NPHS. The second class status of advisory is borne out doubly in the passage above. Recognized as a problem, advisory is not only used as a vehicle to solve problems on another agenda, but the approach to be used with the new material appears to be distinctly academic rather than drawn from an advisory modality. In fact, it sounds virtually identical, in form as well as in content, to a piece of social studies curriculum I saw Larry teach.

Another change for next year is that

> several of us are going to put together resources, lists, movies, lists of issues, exercises, journal prompts. That's the model. Here's what to do -- it's like a curriculum. Here's all the stuff.

What prompted the move to stock a closet full of resources for advisory is not made explicit. An acknowledgment of kids roaming the halls, of advisory as free time for kids and teachers, if this was indeed frankly made at the school, would be a likely motivator. Along with this, presumably understood to some extent as cause, is something to which Larry refers several times in the course of his monologue: teachers with discomfort.

> It's like . . . , it's easier for some people than others. I think about this sort of stuff all the time. That's what I spend my free time thinking about. This year there will be the elections. I feel comfortable with this stuff, some people don't. It's asking a lot of the teacher, sex, race, death.

Larry is telling us that he is one of the teachers for whom this "stuff" is easier, but the interjection about the elections is jarring. True, Larry can lead a discussion on topics which might cause discomfort for others, but one might suppose that he in fact thinks more about the elections than about the personal responses of individuals to life issues. Regardless, he is one, if not the leader of the group that will stock the cabinet. The school must agree with Larry's analysis:

> Why it hasn't worked is primarily time constraints -- material and time. Less than personal. Especially if they're given a wide menu of choices.

When I ask if the resources will actually be prepared he says "Yeah, it will be prepared. There's money." The presumption seems to be that the provision of resources will remedy a problem (kids roaming the halls) which is understood to result from lack of teacher preparation and resources. Larry also says:

> In the past we did more staff planning about advisory. When we had retreats. . . . It has slipped, it's the nature of institutions. . . . Less

support for teachers. The constraints and pressure on teachers have grown tremendously. People need lots of structure. Teachers need to be held accountable just like kids. . . . Sliding downhill. Students are worse. Less prepared, less motivated, less energized. More social problems. And less teacher support. This is how the school works.

Here Larry seems to indicate that the current state of advisory is a symptom of larger pressures. Like CCHS, NPHS used to have money for retreats. The loss of an apparent luxury such as staff retreats may have a particularly negative ripple effect on advisory. Here I surmise: unrelated to advisory itself, retreats are likely to include advisory type activities. By having the opportunity to experience such activities, teachers might be more likely to employ them. In addition, they might be more aware of the potential of advisory as a group situation. As it is, evidence of awareness of group creation, or group process is absent. But I am obviously as firmly in the camp of the personal as Larry is of the political. In Larry's view

> Kids either want to talk with an adult or it's the last thing they want to do.

Simple as that. Take it or leave it. Nothing you can do to affect the situation. It is interesting to observe that missing here is not only a sense of group but even an acknowledgment of advisory as a forum for kids to hear each other's views. Larry seems to see it as being about kids talking with an adult.

Larry also indicates that advisory is a low priority.

> Us in Division I – content. Not. How to be better advisors. That's on the back burner.

He explains that in hiring new teachers, how well a candidate might lead advisory is "that last thing on their mind." Rather, the question is, "Can this person stand up there and teach the math?" Larry does not, however, make a connection between this and the current state of advisory at NPHS. He also makes no mention of administrative attitude toward advisory.

A new subtitle enters as the interview progresses, having to do with barriers to communication, barriers Larry perceives between himself and his

students. Unable to see how twelve-year-old black and Latina girls will want to tell their troubles to a 40-something white man, he mentions "gender issues." Also, he says "several seventh grade girls are just lumps. What are they going to say to me?" He says other groups which meet at the school are helpful, Brotherhood and Girls Inc. The advantage of these groups is that they are led by individuals close in age and background to students. Lucy too had mentioned similar successful afterschool groups.

Another problem Larry experiences is that

> some students might hate the advisor. Familiarity breeds contempt. Banging my head with this kid for two hours trying to get him to do some work [in class]. What kind of relationship can...?

This seems a reasonable objection. So reasonable that I wonder that no one else with whom I spoke had even hinted at such a problem. But then, no one else abjured group creation activities. In Larry's room at advisory time the shape of the desk arrangement and the number of students changed, but the only difference in atmosphere was the diminishment of push to get the students to work. The climate was more relaxed but still permeated by his driving concern.

The third of Larry's categories of obstacles to communication appears to be the fact that

> half the kids have severe social emotional problems outside school. Those with no parents. Melissa [his wife] has been a family therapist for 20 years. If you have all this information what do you do with it?

which is where the interview ended. As soon as I put down my pen, Larry again began to tell stories about specific kids with specific problems. The stories ranged from the gruesome to the pathetic. Telling these tales, Larry showed acute concern as well as frustrated inability to help troubled students. This seems to connect to where Larry began the interview. The very opening premise that Larry presented was that "in a small school you want one teacher to know each kid." This is the notion which underlies the advisor/advisee system, something NPSS is very good at. It is not the basis of

advisory itself. Like the opening of other of my interviews, this beginning proves telling. Larry's responsibilities as advisor make sense to him, and he takes them to heart. This is quite in contrast to advisory toward which he offers no coherent approach, and baldly states "it's an artificial construction."

Larry's passion as an advisor perhaps accounts for his leadership role in addressing the current problems with advisory at NPHS. Otherwise it is difficult to explain entrusting this work to someone who doesn't believe in it. That is, unless the school too sees advisory as an adjunct of the advisor/advisee relationship. This, in fact is how it is presented in the Carnegie Commission report. But in that scenario advisory meets for ten minutes at the beginning of the school day, and on alternate weeks before school to provide meeting time for advisors with small (5-9) groups of students. This is neither a mandate nor a vision for a four hour a week chunk of the school day.

The last story Larry told was of a seventh grade girl performing oral sex in the park. All participants were suspended. Larry recounted that when these students returned to school, the boys were wearing medals, while the girl wore a scarlet letter. He complained of the sexual double standard saying

> It's a real touchy subject because you don't want parents coming in and saying "you told my daughter it's OK to have sex."

I agree that the sexual double standard is a problem, how causing an alleged the last negative impact on the girl. However, it seems to me that the real matter of concern in this incident is the low self esteem of this girl, something that is likely to have engendered these sexual favors in the first place. In the domain of advisory, this personal problem is the more pressing and appropriate matter. Larry's seminar style advisory table is, however, better suited to a discussion of the more political matter of the double standard.

My main concern at NPHS had been less the time assigned to advisory and more the fact that when the time was used, students were not engaged. It was only at rare moments when personal material was thrust into the situation that the forum became compelling, the set of sessions discussed in

the introduction as a prime example. At one point during the interview Larry did give an example of an activity: to talk about "greatest personal danger." Saying this, he added quickly "it's artificial." Perhaps, but if each person around a circle were to share such an experience, the group might begin a bonding process. Respect and understanding could begin to flow.

Since all along, Larry has been aware of the sort of materials that will be stocked in the NPW advisory resource closet, there doesn't seem to be much reason to expect significant improvement in his advisory. With students expected to do "a certain amount of work" (note the negative undertone here towards what is construed as a no-work scenario) we can expect advisory to look more like an academic class. It seems particularly unfortunate that Larry is in a position to train new teachers, to "tell them what to do" during advisory. Larry seems to fit into the category of teachers who, given the choice, might opt out, preferring to teach an additional course. NPW does not appear to have staff members with sufficient understanding of advisory to promote its operation in modalities other than those ordinarily engaged in academic work. Ok, if individuals with such attainment are present, the climate of overwork, in combination with the low priority of advisory mitigates against efforts to take advantage of this goodly chunk of the daily programme.

Simple recognition that there is a sequential process of group creation, indeed, a recognition of the group nature of advisory, would well endorse the use of the materials to be collected in the cabinet. Pulling out a card here, an activity there, is unlikely to serve anyone's deepest needs. At NPW we see the results of the absence of what Laurie said was necessary to the success of advisory: someone in a leadership position to make an issue of advisory, to ensure ongoing support and training for teachers in this unfamiliar terrain. The ungrateful cannot thrive without a defender.

The atmosphere and philosophy at NPW are more political than most school environments. Far from being unusual, Larry is in his element there. I am reminded again of Chris Weal Clark speaking of resistance.

The Literature

A review of the literature on advisory reveals broad support and encouragement for this new institution. But beyond the gloss, of what does the substance consist? The manuscripts of articles turned up in a thorough library search on advisory are mostly by teachers and are specific to advisory in middle school. Typical topics are 'How to Institute an Advisory Program,' 'It's Easy to Start an Advisory Program - If You Navigate Those Obstacles,' and 'Advisory Programs are Well Worth Initiating.' Enthusiasm abounds, but there is little to be found in the way of guidance for the teacher advisor. There is nothing resembling the clarity of thought, the level of examination, of probing into the experience of advisory to be found in articles on advisement in the teacher training context. My earlier comparison, based on the dictionary definitions of the two related institutions, aptly reflects the disparity here. I found literally nothing, among scores of articles, which reflected on the process, on the activity itself. In a realm which might be expected to engender self-reflection, this is not promising. The following excerpts from Middle School Journal will serve to illustrate. They are from an article which characterizes the issues relevant to the successful institution of middle school advisory programs as well as any.

> Relationships are the essence of advisories. These relationships connect students to teachers, students to students, and teachers to teachers. They create a controlled, structured group in a warm, caring, friendly environment where teachers relate to students on a variety of levels. These groups also advisories add fashion to a set of continuum. These relationships are nurtured through a carefully designed program of activities developed around the characteristics and needs of young adolescents. The activities challenge students to think, create and grow, but still provide adequate time to relax, relate and reflect. (L. Jones, 1989, p)

This is more specific and detailed about what goes on in advisory than most.

Jones goes on: 'Many young adolescents need a group to belong to. An advisory may help students establish positive peer group support, so that they will not have to go outside the school to negative norms for a sense of belonging.' Here there seems to be a confusion of intention and reality. Scheduling a group is hardly a guarantee of peer support. Every group is a case in point. The first thing the kids do

> will be warm, alive, spontaneous, connected, compassionate -- able to see the language of the body, hear the feelings between and beneath the words. (ibid., 38)

An open heart is "a condition that is deeply intertwined with presence." (ibid.) To have an open heart, a teacher must be willing to be vulnerable which, she says is a necessary precondition to being fully present in the moment.

Recognizing the difficulty of remaining open day in and day out, even for those who, as Kessler says, have chosen this as a path, Crossroads School provides a forum of support for teachers, a monthly council that is part of the staff support and supervision process. One of the goals is to allow people to express themselves more fully and be open to the full expression of others in many more areas of their lives. This allows for the creation of community -- expanding the notion of "home"(where emotions are more often expressed), to a broader circle of safety and authenticity. (ibid.) This would surely foster community among the faculty, along with whatever personal benefits individual members would accrue. In any case, Kessler's attunement to and articulation of the real issues at hand -- in the lives of adolescents, in the larger society, and in the classroom -- makes her articles worthwhile reading for those interested in fostering a successful advisory program.

I found one other work which needs mention here. This is Jonathan Silin's book Sex, Death and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS. Although Silin's focus is young children and their teachers, and his concern is HIV/AIDS education, much of what he has to say applies directly to advisory. There may be fewer cultural impediments to talking about certain difficult issues with older children but from what I can see the barriers, in teachers and in schools, to discussing such issues, as illuminated by Silin, are prevalent throughout the system. Later I will draw specifically on some of his writing. Here I simply recommend the book to those concerned with enabling teachers to range into realms, death for example, where they may be uncomfortable.

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is a school with a unique philosophy. Although it is located in New York City and was included in the list of schools recommended to my investigation, what I know about El Puente (The Bridge) has been gleaned from a report prepared by outside consultants for the Kettering Foundation, a report which included extensive quotations from Frances Lucerna, the director, and from other members.

Members? Yes. El Puente, located in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, is a membership based community development organization of which the educational initiative is only a part. El Puente believes that education must happen in the context of community and they seem to be in a rare position to effect this. The report did not provide specific information on advisory at the school, only that it exists as an integral part of El Puente's "holistic empowerment model."

The El Puente organization was started by a group of individuals who grew up in Williamsburg and who now live and work there. Fundamental to their approach to education, and to their ability to engender self esteem is a philosophy of education "rooted in an understanding of young people as community members." (Ramirez 1995, 17) Each individual is viewed as a potential resource for the development of the community. As rhetoric this not unique. What is unusual here is the ability of El Puente to provide a context of community that is manageably, graspably scaled. Typically, as at NPSS and CSA, when students go out to do their community service they enter a community that is, essentially, on the scale of contemporary corporate society. Kirkpatrick Sale (1980) makes a convincing case that the maximum size for "human scale" community is 50,000. Yet if the West Side of Manhattan, 59th Street to 110th Street, alone is considered (where CSA is located) we are talking about a population of 200,000 people. D.W. Winnicott, the esteemed British child psychoanalyst, speaking about adolescents says

> We need to accept the fact that psychiatrically healthy persons depend for their health and for their personal fulfillment on *loyalty to a delimited area of society*. (Winnicott 1986)

In a city the size and nature of New York, a defined community at a human scale is rare.

El Puente begins its work with young people by efforts to help "the young person feel safe, respected and cared for." Academics and work projects are built on that foundation. Following are some of Lucerna's words from the report:

> Many young people today perceive that there's no future. Our job is to allow them to live with hope . . . that we have tomorrow. We're trying to tell them that you make history happen. It doesn't just happen. . . .You can't really talk about their academic needs and aspirations if you're not also talking about what's happening in the life of the young person. We have to open up the spirit before we can identify what changes can come about for that young person . . . this allows that person to really dream . . . allows them to fathom their own potential. (ibid., 22-23)

and:

> What was it about the community that helped us get where we were? . . . We realized that we all had a patron (mentor) who was there for us while growing up -- and was there to support us without judgment. These days there aren't as many mentors any more, and they were really instrumental to helping us become successful. (ibid., 6)

I have since heard a leader of the El Puente community speak out in a gathering of educators without apparent awareness that the kind of community which bred his organization, community rooted to a specific place, is not the norm. Williamsburg has peculiarly well defined boundaries and issues. Nevertheless, in vision, in environmental awareness, and most pertinently, in attitude toward its students, El Puenete would appear to present an example of value.

There is one other element mentioned by Lucerna which I would like to discuss here. In an earlier section of this paper mention was made of the role of story in advisement and advisory. Curiously, it is not a topic which is

addressed or even mentioned in the literature on advisory. The subject, however, needs consideration in the context of this study. Certainly a school engaged in developing or supporting an advisory program would want teachers to be at least conscious of the potential value of story. Lucerna comes to the importance of story by saying that education should happen not only "as an outgrowth of community [but that] . . . In our ancestry/history education happened through the telling of stories which connected us to the fabric of life in the community." (ibid.)

Walter Ong's seminal book, Interfaces of the Word is interesting in this domain. He begins by making a connection between "alienation, a favorite diagnosis variously applied to modern man's plight since at least Hegel" and "the technological inventions of writings, print and electronic verbalization" which he says

> are connected with and have helped bring about a certain kind of alienation within the human lifeworld. . . . They have restructured consciousness, affecting men's and women's presence to the world and to themselves and creating new interior distances within the psyche. (Ong 1977, 17)

He says that what he calls "primary orality," the orality of a culture which does not know writing, is "in some ways conspicuously integrative." (ibid., 18) And a few pages later:

> The real word, the spoken word, is always an event, whatever its codified associations with concepts. . . . In this sense, the spoken word is an action, an ongoing part of ongoing existence.
>
> Oral utterance thus encourages a sense of continuity with life, a sense of participation, because it is itself participatory. Writing and print, despite their intrinsic value, have obscured the nature of the word and of thought itself, for they have sequestered the essentially participatory word . . . to a mark on a surface, where a real word cannot exist at all. (ibid., 21)

He says that although it seems banal to point out that the written word is only a code to enable the reconstruction of the real word:

> Many if not most persons in technological cultures are strongly conditioned to think unreflectively just the opposite, to assume that the printed word is the real word, and that the spoken word is

> inconsequential. Permanent unreality is more plausible and comforting than reality that is transient. (ibid.)

If you will bear with this a little longer, he goes on as well to write about the "mother" tongue as opposed to learned Latin, a language which he characterizes as being "always insulated from the writers infancy," or in other words, knowing no baby talk." The areas of consciousness and of the unconscious surfaced in Finnegan's Wake [or by Swift or Woolf] were unreachable in Learned Latin." (ibid., 37) And further:

> The fact that the entire academic enterprise . . . had been conducted in an international no man's language would appear on the face of it to have implications which would be at the very least bizarre and possibly profound. (ibid.)

Unconsciously, some of the present developments in curriculum reform may respond to this, the culture of "dead white men" standing in to be debunked for Learned Latin. But the language of the discourse on multi-cultural education is still very much the language of the academy. The political left has not embraced "being" and brought her to the table any more than it has allowed feminist consciousness (a different kettle of fish than "women's rights") to be nurtured in schools. For my part, my real purpose here might be to bring her in through the back door, to find an opening for her, to evoke her in the advisory circle.

Samuel Caldwell, a Quaker educator speaks more specifically to story in an attempt to define what is particular in Quaker education. Noting that Quaker schools do not seek converts to Quakerism, he wonders what differentiates them from other institutions of progressive education. His answer is that they attempt to cultivate in students "eyes for the invisibles." A person with such eyes would be:

> a person who knows deep down that what we see, taste, touch, smell and hear is not all there is in life; a person who, in an age of rampant materialism, is no mere materialist, . . . a person who has a capacity for reverence. (Caldwell 1980, 11)

How do Quaker schools attempt to accomplish this goal? Meeting for worship, he says, is the primary method, (this is not so helpful for us outside the context of Quaker schools, though the silence which characterizes these meetings might well be considered in the context of advisory) but there are other ways. Looking into curricular methods that might be particular to Quaker schools, Caldwell says:

> Even though things of this realm cannot be adequately described, understood, or explained, they can nevertheless be encountered in a personal way. . . . Pedagogically, this suggests that we must approach this realm experientially by living into it, rather than by talking about it in the abstract. Chiefly for this reason, stories are and always will be one of the best avenues of entry into the invisible realm. A good story does not seek to explain, it merely seeks to set up the proper conditions for encounter with the meaning and significance in our lives. Chosen and employed in a sensitive way, they are one of the finest possibilities for meaningful encounter. (ibid., 14)

Caldwell's articulated understanding of story as an opportunity for encounter is both fresh and invaluable. In addition he speaks more broadly about the arts as an invaluable realm of making the invisible manifest, saying that "The aesthetic experience is one of our most hopeful domains for authentic encounter."

Douglas Sloan, Professor of History and Philosophy of Education at Teachers College had something similar to say. I sought him out hoping to get a handle on how to approach the spiritual dimension of my project and he graciously agreed to speak with me. Sloan confirmed my sense of the problematic nature of the word "spiritual" in the context of education. He went on, however, to talk about what he called the aesthetic approach, nourishing the whole child, the senses. During our meeting in January of 1996 he said that the affective is connected directly with artistic experiences as well as being crucial to imaginative and to strong conceptual thinking. Art, he said, is where the children can bring all their forces, their whole self, and their interests. And he says academic performance improves when children are given the opportunity to express themselves artistically.

This seems so obvious, sensible, and true, notwithstanding the absence in the literature or in my fieldwork of any mention of art -- or story. It was not until May when I attended a presentation given by Judith Scott, Director of Satellite Academy that I came across work which exemplified Sloan's contention. Scott, working with seniors from a student population similar to that of CCHS (all of Satellite's students have dropped out of school at least once) had used portfolios in advisory and had placed advisory at the center of academics.

Mounted on the wall were 10 or 15 paintings, striking, powerful visual images. Each was structured differently yet each was strong and clear in composition. The images, for all their variety, were images of transformation, of journey: the past; the moment or phase of change; and the new. My notes say that students had made a portfolio that was an educational map, a map that "shows them learning." They had, Scott said, a vision. Through this vision they wrote their memoirs and an academic piece. In their presentations they showed what they had made and told what making it had meant for them. In the context of project based learning, the visual part of their exhibitions had energized, fueled students' learning. Among the notable qualities of this approach, Scott mentioned:

1. much more reflection
2. personal qualities people saw in the presenter
3. students gain perspective on their past
4. students connecting to others
5. get to know yourself -- head, heart, hands
6. changes the relationship between teacher and student
   respect for the student/presenter.
   teachers really got to know students

She spoke about what was required to bring this work about. It is, she said, absolutely essential:

- for the faculty to meet every week
- to have a vision of what your seniors can do.

Several points are notable here, the primary one being the use of advisory as the focal point for academics, as a central anchor for the student.[4] Here it has been tried with the aim of improving the odds of graduation for a particularly troubled population -- with heartwarming results. What then might be the possibilities -- for students and for society -- of putting affect at the heart of secondary education?

Another notable point in Scott's presentation is her mention of hands under the unexpected category of: get to know yourself -- head, heart, hands. These are three of the 4-H's, the other being health. In requiring her students to paint a piece of their psychic path she has had them use their hands in the process of expanding their self knowledge. This is perhaps not quite the "tool world" (a phrase of Lucy Sprague Mitchell's that, as we have seen, one of my subjects included in his directives for a sixth grade House curriculum) but it is as close to an example of this mode that my study reveals.

These students have made good paintings. That the paintings have been invaluable in the process of personal growth is of inestimable worth. But there is also something to be said for the sense of competence, of accomplishment, of pride and potential that accompanies the physical working out of an interior image. And these, if you will, are only paintings, creations in two dimensions. Human hands are capable of so much, such various creations. Advisory may not be the place for it, but if we are considering the health of humans and society, as engendered, abetted or hindered in schools, some attention might well be paid to the use of the hands.

The tool world is particularly distant for city dwellers. We have little access to the healthy competence to be gained from hand work. Perhaps in advisory students could share their competencies, whether fixing a bicycle or cooking a pastice. And through the opportunity to share their skills they may

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[4] Another model of the transformative power of this approach -- not the aesthetic, but the putting of affect at the center -- is that tried and true institution called Conference Group at Bank Street.

come to value them more highly as well as to learn new ones from each other. The human propensity to manual creativity is a part of healthy wholeness which needs safeguard and cultivation in a world threatening it with obsolescence. Of course, if the average middle school teacher feels daunted when faced with advisory, and now I have asked him to be a storyteller, how much more out of his element might he feel if directed to lead art activities. Perhaps this explains the complete omission of reference to this category of activity in the literature on middle school advisory.

Scott's presentation is notable too for its use of the word vision. Not once, but several times in different contexts she chose this word. Both her students and her teachers are expected to have it. Certainly, though not far off my tabco "s" word, vision is something upon which a good education would be based, and which it would engender.

hear within us the sounds of the earth crying
Thich Nhat Hanh

Findings and Recommendations

In what follows I draw out what I found in the interviews and observations detailed in the earlier sections. In addition, as in the preceding section, I draw on the reading I did for this study which ranged farther than the topic itself, in other words reading not specifically about advisory.

We have had a look at advisory in New York City in 1996. What can we say that we saw? What constitutes success, or failure? What accounts for them? The answers depend on one's criteria. Rather than evaluating outcomes, such as fewer students expected to drop out before high school graduation, or reduced numbers of students who need to repeat a grade, the focus of this study has been on what is happening -- or not happening, in the classroom and the school, that might affect these, or other outcomes. Is the advisory period used for advisory? Is there engagement in the classroom? What are the goals of the teacher? Of the school? My findings are, of course as qualitative as my data. I spoke with advisors who had considerable experience and training, and with others who had little or none of either one or both. Some of them have advisories which meet weekly, some daily. This alone is rather a large difference in any number of respects. Nevertheless. patterns and themes emerged.

A combination of what might be considered personality or stance, or perhaps most accurately, the personhood of the teacher emerged as a preeminent factor. Along with, and no doubt complementary to this is the evident and expressed necessity for schools to provide both training and ongoing support if they desire a successful teacher advisor program. In addition to training, which emerged as the key ingredient of school support, are certain structural factors, routinely unconsidered, which appear to make considerable difference in potential success.

In the interviews we have seen that teachers personalities, views, and attitudes affect the nature of their advisories. Of course teachers' personalities always affect both how and what they teach. But in advisory, by definition (Webster's notwithstanding) the aim is to educate other aspects of the child than her intellect. In order to accomplish this, certain approaches, or modes of being on the part of the teacher are more effective and desirable than others.

I noted that my interview with Laurie began with her asking me to tell her about my project and ascertaining whether I had observed Family Group. Her approach seemed characterized by an active receptivity, or by an intuitive process of attunement. I found that it was this stance of hers which allowed our interview to go farthest in engaging realms of importance to each of us. Lucy, Nancy and Peter also sought to know "where I was coming from." This approach contrasts with that of David and Larry who spoke *at* me during their interviews, taking the position of experts, with me being a vessel to be filled. David and Larry each knew that my topic was "advisory" and for them that was sufficient. They are busy, after all, and why should they need to know more? Their modus operandi was creditable. Each was happy to tell me about advisory and generous with his time. David in particular had every reason to present himself as an expert. I was there to be informed about advisory as practiced in his school, about which I could hardly know much unless he told me. Nevertheless, the fact remains that with the others in the study the nature of my interaction was substantively different. The others sought to know the specific nature of my interest and inquiry. Some assumed a commonality of purpose.

I do not take issue with the fact that Larry and David were not more attuned to my project. In terms of being the subject of an interview, either mode is unobjectionable. However there is an apparent correlation between receptivity or attunement on the part of interviewees and evidence of success as an advisory leader. I cannot but note the one to one correspondence,

within the confines of this study, between their lack of attunement to me and their lack of attunement to their students. Certainly the story that eventually came out about David's advisory that year was dramatic in this respect.

Another way to conceptualize this dichotomy is revealed in a comparison of Lucy and Larry. The parallels between these two, who teach similar student populations and grade levels, reveal striking differences. Lucy states her goal for advisory as "character development" while Larry wishes to help students become "a better person in the world." These conceptualizations may seem virtually identical but they articulate the dichotomy between a personal and a political stance. Larry offers gun control as a research topic while Lucy addresses "attitude" as the precursor to fights. This she is able to do at the same time that she understands both attitude and fighting as necessary survival skills for her students. Interestingly, if we move from a comparison of the response of these two teachers inside their classrooms to look at what they conceptualize in an interview, we find a reciprocal-like reversal. Lucy is able to articulate violence as the major issue for her students, "if you wanted them to have an issue that they took to heart," while Larry tells me gruesome stories of individual students' lives and expresses his inadequacy to address their resultant psychological problems.

The reader might wonder whether the conclusion I reach here about attunement might be biased by some artifact which distinguishes my relations with men and women. Or whether I intend to imply some sex determined suitability to the role of advisory leader. But neither is the case. The one other man in my small sample is Peter who is clearly a first rate Family Group leader. I spent several sessions with his group, but was able to have only a brief conversation with him. Still, if we are measuring receptivity by how much sense a participant had of what my project was about (a peculiar, if not specious measure, but serviceable in this instance), in those few moments Peter gained more sense of my investigation than either Larry or David. Peter is a gentle soul, a listener, an intuitive, the kind of person who you know will

understand you before you tell him your problem. Larry, lacking a gift for intimacy, might understand too, but it would be difficult to tell him.

Receptivity, being a good listener, a personal presence, attunement to the other, these are desirable, somewhat indistinguishable, useful, perhaps essential qualities for advisory leaders. As we move to considerations on the scale of the school placing priority on advisory, the list might well be headed by a personnel policy. Two approaches may be helpful. One is Restow's (well endowed) model in which teachers who either are not interested or are not good at being advisors are absolved of this responsibility and instead teach an additional course. Another approach would be to include a propensity toward advisory among primary considerations in hiring teachers.

In either case, it would be well to note Peter's concern.

> It used to be that new teachers never got a Family Group of their own. They were paired with an experienced teacher. But that doesn't happen any more -- and people don't know what to do with Family Group -- so they end up not doing anything. The focus tends to be on the Roundtables and seminars.

Pairing new teachers with experienced ones is one approach to training. Since teachers do not come trained in this dimension of education and all schools have faculty turnover, even the best training program needs this or some similar approach if they are to maintain a quality program. In addition, ongoing support is needed, some forum for teacher advisors to get ideas from each other and help with difficult situations. Even Shelley Kessler's specially selected human development teachers need training and support, and do not all succeed.

Support can be in-house, simply time allotted at faculty meetings, or trainings by outside experts. One way or another, certain basics need to be addressed. Jonathan Silin, focused on educating teachers to talk with young children about HIV/AIDS, a situation with strong parallels to training advisory teachers, says:

> Successful preservice and inservice education depends on the provision of adequate time for teachers to express their feelings about HIV/AIDS and their reactions to talking with children about HIV-related issues. For only after these feelings have been acknowledged and discussed can teachers attend to the task at hand. . . . [Experts in the field] emphasize group consciousness-raising for teachers in creating new curricula on social issues. (Silin 1995, 65)

In other words, before expecting teachers to talk with students about topics which might cause them discomfort, they need the opportunity to work through the material for themselves, among themselves. In this context it may be appropriate to address a matter that is conspicuously absent from my data, a matter which is nevertheless a central aspect of my concern. The work of Joanna Macy, social activist and professor of world religions is pertinent. Macy worked for years with people from all walks of life in the context of the nuclear threat. Eventually she came to the conclusion

> that it was the destruction of our life support systems that is ... the deepest and most pervasive source of anxiety in our time. It is not a hypothetical danger like nuclear war, for it is happening now... and people, as much as they would like to deny it, sense it, feel it, often on an inchoate level, in their bodies. The very enormity of the threat makes it harder to talk about it or confront it squarely. (quoted in Seed 1988, 7)

Macy's work in this context came to be known as despairwork. In the passage below we begin to get a sense of it. Besides its value in the context of the present discussion of staff development, Macy speaks directly to the matter of apathy, something mentioned repeatedly by David as an evil to be rooted out. But apathy may be a natural response to our present reality.

> Many activists who rouse us to the fact that or survival is at stake decry public apathy. They often assume, mistakenly, that people do not change because they lack *information*. and that the main job of activists is to provide the missing information. The experience of despairwork suggests that such numbness and apathy does not stem from ignorance or indifference; on the contrary, most of us are aware of the destruction of our planet at the deepest level. But we do not face it, do not integrate it for fear of experiencing the despair that such information provokes. We fear it may overwhelm us. Moreover,

> our society has constructed taboos against the communication and expression of such anguish.
>
> This refusal of feeling takes a heavy toll on us, impoverishing both our emotional and our sensory lives. It also impedes our capacity to process and respond to information as we screen out or filter anxiety-provoking data. But such feedback is precisely what we need to adapt and survive.
>
> Experience with group work has shown that this despair, grief and anger can be confronted, experienced and creatively channeled. Far from being crushed by it, new energy, creativity and empowerment can be released. Unblocking these feelings also opens us to experiencing our fundamental interconnectedness with all life. Often after such experiences, people come together to form ongoing support groups or join existing groups to take action on peace and/or environmental issues. (ibid., 8-9)

This kind of work would surely be an excellent preparation for advisory teachers. But let us move specifically, within the context of this study to the fact that we are living now in the reality of an irreparably damaged planet, witnessing and *participating in* the continuing destruction. With virtual silence in the home, the school and the media around this profoundly disempowering situation, we can hardly be surprised that this is not a hot topic in advisory, or for advisory teachers. I had only one conversation on this topic in the course of my interviews. I rather forced the subject on Lucy. The outcome, presented here is not intended to be considered conclusive but is nevertheless interesting, especially considering how intelligent and well educated a young woman is speaking. We see that her level of attunement to the dynamics of her students is not matched by a sense of the dynamics of our planetary life support system. Particularly jarring is her egocentric time frame.

> **Lucy**: I guess ecologically I still think that the trees or the parks will still be around for the rest of my lifetime and I have a hard time seeing . . . I've seen things build up, I don't know if this is because I'm 27, but I've seen areas build up that weren't built up before that were...
>
> **Gail**: Natural before?

Lucy: Yes, so I've seen that, but somehow I, in theory I can understand, but I don't *feel* an urgency. I like the fact of taking care of my environment but I don't *feel* that it's in crisis. It's not a *feeling*, it's like a...

Gail: Intellectually do you think it is?

Lucy: Yes, intellectually I can understand that it would be. It's not intellectually that I think it is, I didn't come to that myself. People say, this is wrong, this is trouble, -- predictions or whatever, so I'm like, "Oh, okay."

Gail: But you don't take it in emotionally or you don't....

Lucy: Right.

Gail: You don't necessarily disbelieve them but you don't deal with it?

Lucy: Yes, I haven't internalized it or something like that. But also in different times of my life I have been particularly passionate about ...like recycling was a big thing. I always carried around my trash and reused my plastic bags and tried to buy things in big sizes or all that kind of stuff. That was an important thing to me for awhile, but then it became, I don't know. My location shifted and it wasn't my job to do that and it didn't come back.

It is interesting that Lucy is able to articulate the discrepancy between her intellectual understanding and what she has "internalized." Interesting too is her use of the conditional in "I can understand that it *would* be," indicating disbelief. Clearly Lucy is in no position to help her students face subliminal fears about environmental collapse. The passage concludes on another compelling note. While recycling is hardly a systemic response to the crisis at hand, Lucy provides direct evidence of the essential connection of rootedness to place and engagement with solutions.

But let us return to Silin wrestling with educators who refuse to address the larger social problems underlying their students' needs, a resistance which seems to him "to be part of a conscious strategy to manage their own lives in

an unmanageable and unimaginable world." (Silin 1995, 50) Writing of "the right of every child to tell his or her own story [which] cannot be told without reference to the worlds in which they occur," Silin says:

> When we seek relief for ourselves and our students by excluding the world, of which it is so easy to despair, we conspire in denying those whom we claim to help. Hope resides in time and time can only be lived in the world, a world of many unsettling realities, a world that includes HIV/AIDS" (ibid., 51)

and environmental catastrophe.

Let us return to other elements of staff development for advisory. The foremost of these is group creation skills or techniques. The creation of a bonded group seems to be a prerequisite to most of the work of advisory. A sampling of suggestions along these lines appears in the final section of this paper. I will not elaborate approaches to this because a range of tools are available in published materials. One consideration to note is the need for teachers to experience these modalities before being expected to use them.

There are other more structural factors to consider which impact the potential formation of a bonded group, longevity and composition for example. The success of the program at CCHS clearly derives in large part from the fact that groups there are structured to continue indefinitely, turnover resulting only from incoming and departing students and teachers. Trust builds over time, allowing for the essential qualities of family to emerge. But while this mixed age group works well for high school students, it might be inappropriate for middle school where the developmental level -- between 6th grade boys and 8th grade girls for example -- of students is so disparate. Here, the most effective composition might be single age groupings. Ideally such groups could be structured to remain intact for the duration of the middle school years. Efforts to create opportunities for groups to meet periodically in single sex configurations would also be worthwhile.

Another important consideration for the school is well articulated by Laurie:

> The culture of the school is just totally crucial to having it really work. The school has to work as a whole. Like we said before, the emphasis on Family Group and the importance of Family Group and what goes on in Family Group has to be a school-wide value. And people have to be helped when things are going wrong in their Family Group and they need a place to go that is non-judgmental, and they need support groups.

In a school such as CCHS, where advisory plays so prominent a role in the program, this is no doubt true. What also became clear is that the key, or prerequisite to creating such a culture in the school is that there be someone in a leadership position who champions advisory. But even in a school where advisory plays a less prominent role such a person is essential for a successful program. This is because just as teachers do not come trained as advisors, administrators also lack background in this department. The rationale and implications of a well considered policy adopted for the academic classroom may not serve well for advisory, mixed age groupings in middle school being a case in point. Or, for example, if a school has many fewer boys than girls as is the case at CSA, to divide them evenly may be quite reasonable for regular classes, but serves neither the boys nor the groups well for advisory.

Other, more specific suggestions include Laurie's opinion that

> The ideal Family Group is 16 or 17 with two teachers. You share the calling home. And that dialogue across the room. I think that's so fruitful. When you have a partner you get a chance to process afterwards, stuff that went on in the group and you get a chance to parlay a little bit on how you saw it or things you learn about the students. And different teachers click with different students, some of you get closer to some of the students and others to other students or your partner may have a different point of view about that student that might help you very much.

House at Restow also has 17 students. These two schools depart from the norm which seems to be a group size of 10 to 13. The assumption at the schools with smaller groups seems to be that smaller is more intimate, but perhaps the real intimacy does not begin to accrue (or is counterbalanced by

other dynamics) until the size gets closer to six, as in conference group at Bank Street.

Another valuable consideration indicated by my data is the idea of an advisory portfolio. Even without re-forming the academic structure around it as at Satellite Academy, an advisory portfolio might be particularly valuable in schools with daily advisory. Such a portfolio would lend focus to this block of time in the schedule, and would give it some weight as well, especially where there is no operating assessment format for advisory. (Some form of assessment is definitely to be encouraged.) Lateness problems might diminish. But what is also exciting about this concept is the framework it could provide for self exploration, something that seems to be difficult to get at.

Indeed the use of any art form appears to have powerful possibilities. Likewise such musical forms as singing and drumming can be significant tools in group creation. All of these however require specific talents or experience on the part of teachers. The powerful images produced by Judith Scott's seniors at Satellite Academy were enabled by the fact that one of the classroom teachers involved in the program happened to be a trained and experienced visual artist. Perhaps the best realistic recommendation I can make in terms of these artistic modalities is that administrators be aware of their potential so that they can encourage and support the use of available artistic resources in advisory.

To conclude my recommendations I would like to return to story. In the previous section we heard Ong writing about the participatory quality of the spoken word, Caldwell on (traditional) stories as encounter with the meaning and significance in our lives, Lucerna speaking of the telling of stories in our ancestry, stories which connected us to the fabric of life in the community. We noted the absence in the literature of mention, much less discussion, of the use of stories, either personal or traditional. Nowhere in the literature on

advisory or in my data is there the mere mention of traditional story. This is despite the usual recognition of advisory as a forum for ethical or moral development, despite the age old use of stories for this purpose, and despite the fact that humans are a storytelling animal. Neither is there information in the literature designed to help the teacher encourage or work with such personal stories as students may bring to the group. Further, I find it peculiar that while reading for this paper outside the specific domain of advisory, I found a reasonable amount of material on story, but there was nothing which pertained to adolescents. Vivian Paley's Wally's Stories: Conversations in the Kindergarten, Robert Cole's The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination, and Mary Catherine Bateson's Composing a Life, to name the most engaging, are about story and the very young, or story and adults. Work on story and adolescents is conspicuously absent, yet adolescence is the time when an individual must begin to bring their inner story out into the world. Novels, even coming of age novels cannot, I suspect, adequately serve the cultural purpose traditionally reserved for story.

And my own data on the use of stories is too thin to be of value. Another kind of study would be required, a long term observation of one group, to see how this works. Such a study has been done of a conference group at Bank Street. Gail Hirsch wrote this of stories told in her group during her year long case study:

> It became clear that the main thinking activity across all of the group sessions was the conversational constructing and exchanging of stories, or fragments of stories, all commenting on the teaching experience. . . . Through the telling, it seemed as if members were distancing themselves just enough from recent experiences to reflect on them. (Hirsch 1991, 103)

Later she says that since the completion of her study she has come to "understand the conference group activity more profoundly now as an intensely complicated and productive occasion for learning and teaching -- as a powerful pedagogical process of meaning construction." (ibid., 29)

Approaching story in advisory from another direction, it should be noted that reading is often included in these programs. Schools with a heavy dose of advisory in their schedule often allocate one day a week to silent reading. These, as well as other schools also occasionally use movies and sometimes novels as jumping off points for ethical discussion, but apparently never stories. It should be noted that one point to be made about stories is that when people sit in a circle and tell stories they are all, including the teller, equal. (Bly 1989) Watching a video or movie, or reading a book for material for ethical discussion lacks this invaluable democratic element.

Some schools under pressure to raise reading levels, or for other reasons transform their weekly advisories into book discussion groups. In these cases the initial intention is to select books conducive to advisory type discussion, but in little time reading tends to become the definitive focus. This is only one of many ways in which schools attempt to use advisory to serve more than one function. Dual duty may be workable if a culture of advisory is retained, but often in these cases the added functions are the overriding priorities.

On the other end of the spectrum of story from novels are personal stories, the stock in trade of conference group. Laurie, working with high school students, described it as "fabulous" when students came in with such a story. She wished it would happen more often. Lucy wishes students would come in with a problem, "something that's right then and now," because her middle school students do not save problems to bring to the group. Her students do tell less immediate stories and the closest I came to finding an articulated approach to story was Lucy's encouragement of storytelling for the basic skill her students need in recounting a coherent tale, combined with her encouragement of questions for the teller. Her articulation, perhaps due to the limitations of her situation, does not reach to stories as tools for self understanding and development. Silin speaks to this. Although his context is kindergarten, what he says applies directly.

When children come to school they bring unique histories,

> comprised of all their prior interactions with the environment. Because every interaction involves potentialities and opportunities, there is always a contingency in the telling, the very qualities that the highly rationalized curriculum seeks to suppress. While educators may not be able to change the economic and political structures that promote violence and social injustice, they can play a transformative role in the lives of individual children by helping them formulate strong, coherent identities. During simpler times a sense of continuity and identity could be assumed through participation in community life, but at moments of social disjuncture or individual upheaval, the construction of personal history takes on a special significance. It must be nurtured by institutions like schools where children learn about self in the presence of others, individuals define themselves in and through group membership, and pluralism is respected as the basis of democratic governance.
>
> Such self-knowledge is a matter of re-collection. In this sense, being a self entails having a story. . . . By encouraging our students to become storytellers, we can help them to maintain the necessary tension between their work in the present as archaeologists of the past and architects of the future. (Silin 1995, 46-47)

This does not give us techniques, but it provides a powerful and coherent rationale for encouraging personal narrative in a shared context. The strength of this rationale results from the fact that it is based on recognition of the realities of both the individual and society. This could be the beginning of a way toward the fashioning of "a promising vision of the future" stipulated by the Carnegie Council. But it should be remembered that what is discussed here is specifically an oral, a communal process. Even teachers familiar with the relatively common practice of written personal narratives are likely to need support and guidance for this kind of work with story with the coming of age set.

Yet another thread concerns material to be found in other books concerning our society's present lack of a coherent story, and of our resultant cultural malaise. If by encouraging our students to become storytellers we are indeed, as Silin suggests, enabling them to become architects of the future, we begin to find an approach even to this meta problem through personal narrative. At the end of Actual Minds, Possible Worlds, Jerome Bruner, after discussing the developmental theories of Freud, Piaget and Vygotsky, says:

> I have not said anything about what seems to me to be at the heart of contemporary sensibility beyond what was put there by the insights of our three titans. We are living through a cultural revolution that shapes our image of the future in a way that nobody, however titanic, could have foreseen a half-century ago. It is a revolution whose shape we cannot sense, although we already sense its depth. We are in danger of annihilating ourselves with unthinkably powerful weapons, and we cannot bear to think about it directly, for there is nothing we seem able to do to control the danger. We are, in consequence, in deep malaise, a malaise of futurelessness. It is difficult for any theory of human development to gain a hold on the "cultural imagination" of those who dread that there may be no future. For a theory of development is, *par excellence*, a future topic.
>
> When and if we pass beyond the unspoken despair in which we are now living, when we feel we are again able to control the race to destruction, a new breed of developmental theory is likely to arise.....If we have learned anything from this dark passage in history through which we are now moving it is that man, surely, is not "an island, entire of itself" but a part of the culture that he inherits and then recreates. The power to recreate reality, to reinvent culture, we will come to recognize, is where a theory of development must begin its discussion of mind.[5] (Bruner 1986, 148-149)

Well, we are not discussing theories of development, but just possibly we are discussing a forum for culture creation. Regardless of the status retained by developmental approaches to education, the fact that there is a period between childhood and adulthood when human beings "come of age" will continue to be true. And it is unlikely that anytime soon young people will find themselves supported in this task by a coherent cultural milieu. It might therefore be well to consider the use of the emergent institution of advisory as a forum for youth to formulate and articulate their own visions of the future, their personal path in the context of an image of the future they would like to help to build.

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[5] The year following Bruner's publication the Berlin wall came down. Warheads began to be dismantled. The nuclear threat became a rouge threat more than a systemic one, leaving Macy's analysis of our deepest fears to stand uncontested, although clearly the threat of nuclear destruction still plays a strong and little understood, little examined part in human development.

A multi-year process of exploration, using the arts and other modes of approach to self-discovery, perhaps culminating in a celebration involving family and community, a celebration of the transition the young person makes as she starts out in her stated direction, might begin to serve a basic human need which we have long forgotten, even forgotten how to serve. Advisory is intended to meet "important non-academic needs" of students. These are various, and require various approaches. But if one need is central, both for the well being of the individual student, and for society, it is the matter of the young person's finding a purposeful sense of direction. And, at this traditional coming of age stage in human development, our youth need to understand that we need them, that what they do matters, not only for themselves, but for the world. And as Frances Lucerna of El Puente says, first you have to open up the spirit. The student must connect with himself before seeing their particular path. If we are to find our way into a new mythos, one that will replace the notion brought to this continent by the European settlers, the notion that nature is sacralized by use, that man is apart from nature, we need to begin reaching back into ourselves and finding..., well finding what there is to find.

And so I think we need to make special efforts to offer in-service training to teachers and to include this realm in teacher training. In these anomalous times, when society is radically unpatterned, if we are to have hope, to have a future, it rests, as ever before, with our young people. But they cannot be expected to see their way in so complex a universe without guidance. Let them have advisory, not as a "weather report", nor as (possibly less useful) "advice." Let it be a coming to the self, in a safe circle of peers, with a mentor presiding.

It's not about answers, it's about questions.

S. Hellerer

Three Experts Offer Suggestions

In this section I have collected ideas and suggestions that might be useful to teachers and others responsible for advisory. It is by no means intended as a comprehensive program. It is not even meant as recommendations in the sense that I think everyone ought to do these things. Some of these activities diverge considerably from the normal range of classroom occupations, and are beyond the experience, even outside the classroom, of the average teacher. As has been said elsewhere, schools attempting to nurture their advisory program would best provide opportunity for teachers to experience these activities among themselves if they would like to see them successfully introduced in the classroom. An outside expert would be helpful, but is not necessary if one among the faculty can be found who can lead a given activity with conviction.

There are, of course, compendiums of community building activities available to teachers and group leaders. I have not reviewed this literature which includes such basics as *Tribes*, and the *New Games* series. Another resource is the Mysteries curriculum, mentioned in the Literature section of this paper. The contact address for this and related material is included in the references section of this paper.

Included here is a quick tour of awareness exercises from acting training and a discussion of the elements of sacred circles. These are from interviews I conducted with an actor turned (Bank Street educated) high school teacher and a leader of women's sacred circles. Also included are some of Laurie's favorite activities.

I have paraphrased and quoted from my notes on a conversation with Emmett Smith. Smith is an actor turned teacher. His training was under George Morrison, master acting teacher, from whose exercises Smith developed his approach to high school students. His material provides some concrete approaches to specific concerns raised in this paper. Towards the end of my interview with Lucy, for example, she expressed a wish for more intimacy in her advisory group. Laurie noted that students often do not know what they are feeling. These exercises also address the matter of bonding, basic to group formation. Included along with the exercises are some thought provoking concepts familiar to trained actors, but perhaps surprising to the lay audience.

Smith says that in acting "you have to know what you're feeling. And you have to know your meta feeling, your feeling about your feeling." Such skills are valuable in life as well, most would agree, but developing them might be thought to fall into the bailiwick of psychology. Though some of the exercises Smith mentions are based on the Gestalt work of Fritz Perls (Perls is also mentioned in Laurie's paper), they are not therapy. They are more like games that could be conducted by anyone.

> To help a person be present you teach the difference between being present and more present. You say, now I'm aware of . . . you looking at me. You include the external, ... of the chair, and the internal, ... of the tension around my eyes. You follow yourself, your own experience. The question in that is: what are you leaving out? Now I'm aware of thinking something I don't want to say aloud.
>
> The next step is to find an awareness that's especially uncomfortable. Then you go into it deeper. My hands are shaking, my heart is beating. The more you contact it, it's going to change. Feeling, including pain, moves. Then you can do awarenesses in front of an audience.

Another exercise is to have thoughts in front of people. You sit in front of an audience. Think anything you want. You might look across at someone and think thoughts about them. And then you say aloud "You don't know what I'm thinking, and you never will." This gives you more room. It also emphasizes the difference between thinking and action, and that people can't read your mind. This is powerful for adolescents to realize.

Another exercise is to experience parts of yourself. Working in pairs, someone asks you "who are you?' "I am the considering part of myself...the tired part of myself...the embarrassed laughing part of myself. The next step is to find an interesting one and ask a question: "If you're the melancholy part of you, who do you have me be?" Another step is to verb it: the knowing part of me *feeds* the curious part of me. (It doesn't have to be verbal.) Finally, ask "How do you feel about that?" Then partners switch roles.

Some exercises are designed to help you be present with someone by being able to follow them. Others are to help you be able to love yourself.

Smith says the better the actor, the more they love themselves. The best actor feels that all parts of herself are gifts, no parts are left out. He also says that every time you include something you usually would leave out, the benefit is an expanded definition of who you are. You immediately have more energy.

I'm here and you're there and we commune. I have myself, you have yourself, and we meet, we're present to each other, alive. If I can follow myself in front of you, moment to moment, be here with myself, I can be here with you. If I am present to myself in that way, I can necessarily be present to you.

Here's another one: Hum. Stand behind the person and hum into them, all over, around the head and ears. This is a very intense, strong way of feeling relationship to each other, other than verbal. Another hum involves having the group stand around a person

lying and hum through them. Then keep humming and carry the person around. A low hum is just starting the fire. As it gets louder the fire expands.

This is community building and trust building. It is also working with energy.

Smith also offered a series of entrainment exercises, all of which operate in silence. The most traditional form of group entrainment is drumming, often undertaken in a ritual context. Singing is another mode. Here are exercises designed for individual or partnered work. Eventually students can experiment with these techniques out on the street. For example, stop and look in a shop window. Others will stop. When you leave, others will too. Or you might find better service on the lunch line if you "get with the server's rhythm." Smith even suggests that a teacher might consciously entrain with a student he's in trouble with. The first three exercises are for partners.

- You both take off your shoe. Then you both throw your shoes to each other at the same moment.
- Walk around the room -- can see each other out of the corner of your eye but not looking at each other -- do things together -- turn. Leader says "walk on the outside of your feet."
- Get with the other person's breathing.
- Rock in your chair (others will begin to do the same.)

Mirroring -- no leader -- is another technique mentioned both by Smith as well as by Laurie. Here he means doing it physically, as an entrainment exercise in which the two people move as one, facing each other. Laurie would use it as a verbal technique to reflect back to the student what he is saying.

No one teacher might be comfortable doing all of these, but most could use some. It is easy to see how these exercises (and a staff development

session) could be useful in the contexts we have seen. And they would be fun.

Essential Elements of Sacred Circles

Susan Hellerer has devoted herself to the creation of circles of safe, sacred space. She has a degree in Chaplaincy from Union Theological Seminary and has worked extensively in women's sacred circles. The concept of "safe space," as defined by D. W. Winnicott is central to t approach. This is manifest in the fact that she begins her discussion by explaining that the circle in which we sit represents that same circle of safety originally experienced in mother's arms. She spoke too, of holding a "both/and" mindset, by which I believe she means a mindset in which internal and external reality may coexist. This, too, relates directly to Winnicott's ideas about human development from infancy through the grandest creations of our artists and scientists. What follows is reconstructed from notes.

> It's not about answers, it's about questions. Can we ask the right questions. In Chaplaincy you're not there with the answers. You're there as witness.

Hellerer says the circle acts as a container, noting that "adolescents need very clear boundaries." She lists three ways to begin to create safe space. First, to be in a circle; second, by introducing ourselves; third, "if everyone prays together. That just changes the whole atmosphere, there's a deepening and intentionally." I have to ask what she means by praying. She lists meditation, grounding, and "just breathing."

She says it very much helps if it's always at the same time and the same place and to have elements about the process that are the same. Elements that would be the same would include always beginning by introducing ourselves, and always ending in a particular way. And it is very important that the facilitator be *in* this.

Hellerer's approach to creating this contained space is that of an artist. She uses her creative energies to find ways to set the time off, set the space off,

to make it different from what came before, in ways that are likely to appeal to the specific group of characters she hopes to engage. Part of the specialness is created by focusing, raising all the attention to this one particular moment. "Also we intentionally acknowledge that we're setting this time aside for ourselves. And that is an act of empowerment. This is a time when self-worth is taken very seriously."

In Hellerer's scenario, story is always important. She says, "We're going to be present and we're going to listen to each other's stories. And each person gets allowed, acknowledged. This is their hour, space, time. Within that structure each one has their own personal time. Can allow feedback or not." In her ritual circles, from my own observation, I would say that each person is asked, invited to participate. There is a slow, deliberate movement around the circle of the telling of each participant's intention, or story. This slow pace raises an expectation *within* each person, that they will lend their voice to the proceedings. She says that you are doing ritual to contain the energy of the experience without it being religious, to build a sense of safety. My observation leads me to add that the ritual enhances, as well as contains the energy of the meeting.

Hellerer also spoke about the "four point meeting" although I have notes on only three points. This seems to be generic self-help stuff, which could be useful as well. Point one is clearing. She says you keep going around the circle until everyone is clear, saying what you want to say right now. This can be helpful as tensions arise between group members. The third point is to articulate a desire, a goal, something you want to happen in your life. Fourth is to state one concrete thing you will do toward that goal within the next week, or before the next meeting. And then, she says, you've got a group to be accountable to. And you get affirmation when you do it. This type of process could be useful in a situation (as at CCHS) where you might have both a bonded group and a troubled population.

Using affirmations, also from self-help literature, is another of Hellerer's suggestions. She also notes that any activities such as these in which people allow themselves to be vulnerable serve to promote bonding.

Laurie's Favorites

At the end of one of my interviews with Laurie she began to list some of her favorite activities. Some were in the form of going around the circle telling stories on such topics as the time I was most afraid, or my earliest childhood memory. She had students write personal ads. Often she would have students take a piece of paper with a name as they came in. She did different things with this. Half way through the semester or the year she did "First Impressions." Students would write, "When I first met you I thought..., Now that I know you better I feel.... ." Then pass the paper to the person and the person could read it aloud if they wanted. Or she brought a bag of all the same stuff, candies maybe, at Easter, Christmas, holidays, and students would take from the bag and present it to the person whose name they drew.

After summer vacation: bring a roll of toilet paper and pass it around telling students to take as much as they want but don't tell them why. Then "tell us one thing about you for each piece you took." This was fun and she says "you need humor, especially in the beginning." Another suggestion for the beginning of the year uses tennis balls. Throw to someone, say their name. Then when it gets dull add in another ball and another. A different ball activity uses a big rubber ball or beach ball. Have the group try to keep the ball up for a certain number. Try to make 25. They learn they have to tap gently, work cooperatively. Then challenge them for more.

She talks about the elements of safe space which include respecting each other's opinions -- no killer statements, in other words, not to say, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard!" You can say, "I don't agree with you." or "I don't see your point." But the kids need to be trained. That isn't how they all operate all the time and so there has to be good-humored, ongoing teaching of how to react that way. And if somebody does say something like that, if

you can catch it in time and have good humor about you, you might be able to say, "Excuse me, did you want to rephrase that?' You try your best to keep it on an upbeat level so you don't go ahead and attack the person who just attacked the other person. You don't want to stay in "attack" mode.

On another note, she suggests having them home. Anything personal that you share. They love that. This is corroborated by the interest on the part of Peter's Family Group in visiting his home, likewise by Lucy.

Get the kids to feel empowered. They feel they have buttons. They're a computer and someone pushes the fight button and they're going to fight. Who's in charge? That's a logical approach. It doesn't fly. Another way to talk about it is outcomes. Dignity -- face. Who has more dignity, the person who says "one more word out of you" or the person who says "sorry, I wasn't watching where I was going"? Dignity is really the question.

Decisions in fairness, when there's emotion about it you go around the room, find out opinions, how people feel about this. And then there is the question of how the teachers will rrspond. Is Peter going to talk like a teacher or give a heartfelt response? There is always suspicion as well as respect; you have to prove yourself all the time. At a point leadership becomes appropriate. I might say, "Should we write letters, what do you think Peter?" (Peter was not as enthusiastic as I about writing letters.) This models a way of consulting with each other.

An exercise for teachers: imagine someone were drowning and you were able to reach down and pull them out -- my most troubled students.

I would have a star of the week. Deep personal stuff. See, that's what I mean about spirituality -- it's not definable. Those moments of deep personal sharing are spiritual moments. They influence the tone of the group forever.

Speaking about Mysteries, Laurie said they had the idea that their seniors were self sabotaging -- that they were afraid to make the transition to go on. Mysteries is a spiritual approach, with a lot of practical pieces to it. I'm definitely making a distinction between spiritual and religious. One of the first rituals -- darkened room, candle -- ask the kids to meditate -- as you look

into the candle -- think about.....your dream of the future.....greatest fear.....where you want to be in five years. Many kids had not been exposed to a ritual of that kind and they were being set apart to participate in these actually rites of passage. Some of the mysteries activities could be introduced.

Rites of passage -- that you've been through. You might ask if any of you have been through things after which you're not the same.

One of the things we used to do which I liked -- if there was a school issue -- often Family Groups were asked to come up with a message, a sign, poem, poster that represented their view. Then in teams school wide each group would make their presentation. So that school wide you knew that you were a family group. For example on the 5th anniversary of CCHS -- what the school means to me. In Laurie's Family Group we feel.....

Sometimes three or four people are dominating. I'll stop the discussion and say we haven't heard anything from _____, _____, _____, _____, _____. I'll call them by name because you have to make space. Sometimes you find out that those quiet people think something very different, like in society. And it changes a lot what goes on in the room.

It's good to have family rituals -- birthday parties, celebrations, surprise parties for Laurie. Unfortunately you have to have baby showers. One of the most special things were trips. She speaks about taking them to a French Restaurant -- a totally unfamiliar experience.

"Twelve Angry Men" is a good movie to show about one man who makes a difference. You could find many examples of one person making a difference. Bring up women who made a difference. Talk in Family Group about one time when you really made a difference. And then you remember more. Another good movie to show is "Rashomon," a Japanese movie in black and white with subtitles (a lot of them have never seen a foreign film). I would show a little tape, then ask students to describe what they saw. Or I might say "We're just going to act out a little scene here." "Rashomon" is the

quintessential movie about point of view -- murder, rape, class differences. What's the truth, the reality.

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